

### Abstract

The 1915-1918 Genocide unleashed a literary frenzy in Armenian communities in diaspora. It generated not only literary writing expressive of the urgency of the Armenian plight but also heated debates about the purpose, function and direction of Armenian literature, especially in the crucial period of 1919-1928. This thesis brings under scrutiny the discussions of Armenian literature in this crucial period – the formative years of post-Genocide Armenian diaspora in France, Egypt, and the USA. More importantly, it explores the role of literature and literary criticism in the formation of the Armenian cultural identity.

The debates on the future of Armenian literature is found primarily in the printed press of the diaspora. Literary critical materials were mainly published in the form of articles in this printed press in the Western Armenian language, the “official” language of post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. The focus of this thesis is understandably on materials appearing in the post-Genocide Armenian printed press during the years 1919-1928, in Cairo, Paris, Boston and New York, which are the main sites towards which Armenians in general and writers and intellectuals in particular gravitated in the post-Genocide exodus from Ottoman Turkey, including former Armenian cultural centres, such as Constantinople and Smyrna.

This thesis, in seven chapters, provides a picture the cultural, political and intellectual topography of the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. It gives an account of the resilience of the people of culture in the aftermath of the Genocide, when concerted efforts were made in the reorganisation of the cultural and educational life, in order to maintain the Armenian identity. It then discusses the different perceptions of literature by Armenian literary critics in the context of post-Genocide struggle for survival. This is intended to demonstrate the ways in which literature was mobilised for the struggle for survival and the building of community. Literature was not only an aesthetic enterprise but also a social and political institution, a potent tool in achieving social and political unity leading to the coherence and maintenance of Armenian cultural identity. It finally discusses the ways in which critics looked at the future direction of Armenian literature of the diaspora. Debates among the critics at the time, such as Kourken Mkhitarian, Peniamin Tashian, Nigoghos Sarafian, Garo Sasouni, Hrand Palouyian and others, focused on the feasibility of promoting Armenian ethnic values in literature outside “homeland”. These debates, it may be argued, comprised two strands of thought. One viewed literature as an important tool of preservation of the Armenian cultural

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identity in diaspora from nationalist perspective. The proponents of this trend were senior writers, such as Garo Sasouni and Kourken Mkhitarian. And the other, headed by a new generation of writers, such as Nigoghos Sarafian and Hrand Palouyian, advocated an innovative approach to literature. It promoted the idea of hybridisation of Armenian literature with other literatures. These two trends would become the two dominant schools of Armenian literary criticism from 1928 until today.

**Literature and Survival:  
Literary Criticism and the Construction of Cultural  
Identity in Armenian Printed Press of Diaspora 1919-1928**

**PhD Thesis**

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### Abstract

The 1915-1918 Genocide engendered a flurry of literary activity in Armenian communities in diaspora that generated not only writing that expressed the urgency of their plight but also heated debate about the purpose, function and direction of Armenian literature, especially in the crucial period of 1919-1928. This thesis scrutinises the discussions of Armenian literature in this period the formative years of post-Genocide Armenian diaspora in France, Egypt, and the USA. More important, it explores the role of literature and literary criticism in the formation of Armenian cultural identity.

Debate about the future of Armenian literature is found primarily in the printed press of diaspora. Literary critical materials were mainly published in the form of articles in the Western Armenian language, the “official” language of post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. The focus of this thesis are materials appearing in the post-Genocide Armenian printed press during the years 1919-1928, in Cairo, Paris, Boston and New York, which were the main sites towards which Armenians in general and writers and intellectuals in particular gravitated in the exodus from Ottoman Turkey, including former Armenian cultural centres such as Constantinople and Smyrna.

This thesis in seven chapters depicts the cultural, political and intellectual topography of the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. It gives an account of the resilience of people involved in cultural activities in the aftermath of the Genocide, when concerted efforts were made to reorganise cultural and educational life in order to maintain the Armenian identity. It then discusses the different perceptions of literature by Armenian literary critics in the context of the post-Genocide struggle for survival. This is intended to demonstrate the ways in which literature was mobilised for the struggle for survival and the building of community. Literature was not only an aesthetic enterprise but a social and political institution, a potent tool in achieving social and political unity leading to the coherence and maintenance of Armenian cultural identity. Finally, the thesis discusses the ways in which critics looked at the future direction of diasporan Armenian literature. Debates at the time among critics such as Kourken Mkhitarian, Peniamin Tashian, Nigoghos Sarafian, Garo Sasouni, Hrand Palouyian and others, focused on the feasibility of promoting Armenian ethnic values in literature outside “homeland”. These debates, it may be argued, comprised two strands of thought. One viewed literature as an important tool for preserving Armenian cultural identity

in diaspora from a nationalist perspective. The proponents of this trend were senior writers such as Garo Sasouni and Kourken Mkhitarian. And the other, headed by a new generation of writers including Nigoghos Sarafian and Hrand Palouyian, advocated an innovative approach to literature. It promoted the hybridisation of Armenian literature with other literatures. These two trends would become the two dominant schools of Armenian literary criticism from 1928 until today.

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## Notes on transliteration, translation and references

### *Transliteration*

There are a number of transliteration systems for the Armenian alphabet. The academic transliteration system which was widely employed in classical Armenian studies is that of Hubschmann, but it is already obsolete and can be confusing. A second system is based on the Eastern Armenian phonetics and is widely used by academics. I have preferred not to use either of these systems and have adopted a system which may seem unorthodox; this is based on Western Armenian phonetics for the following two reasons. Firstly, the literature and source materials in question were written in Western Armenian and it therefore seemed more appropriate to transliterate accordingly to preserve phonetic authenticity. Secondly, as a native Western Armenian speaker I prefer a transliteration system which corresponds to my own phonetics.

In the transliteration of personal names I have kept the authenticity of the source materials. For example in this thesis there are two ways of transliterating the Armenian male name Հրանդ/ւն [Hrant/d]. Hrant (real name Melkon Gyurjian) (1859-1915) was a writer from Constantinople who signed his name as Հրանդ, while the Parisian critic Hrand Palouyian (1904-1968) signed his name as Հրանւն.

It is worth noting that the French usage of the letter /é/ might cause some confusion, since it substitutes the Armenian letters «ը» (the letter /a/ in the word “about”) and «է» (the letter /e/ in the word “red”). Any confusion in this matter concerns only those words which end with these letters. For example the title «Արուեստը Ամէն Բանէ Առաջ» is transliterated “Arevesdé Amen Pané Arach”.

### *Tranliteration Table*

ա	a	ի	i	հ	h	ւ	d
բ	p	լ	l	ն	n	ր	r
գ	k	խ	kh	շ	sh	ց	ts
դ	t	ծ	dz	ո	vo/o	ւ	v
ե	ye/e	կ	g	չ	ch	փ	p
զ	z	ֆ	h	պ	b	ք	k
է	e/é	ձ	ts	ջ	ch	օ	o
ը	e/é	ղ	gh	ռ	r	ֆ	f
թ	t	ճ	j	ս	s		
ժ	zh	մ	m	վ	v		

### *Translation*

One of the difficult tasks of this project was the accurate translation of the source materials. My main approach was to be as loyal as possible to the text while conveying the right meaning into English. As for the translation of the titles of books and media outlets, I did not translate proper names, such as the name of the literary periodical *Anahid*, also referring to an Armenian goddess. I have to mention that all the titles are translated only once. I have also to bring to the reader's attention that for citations I have not mentioned the numbers of the pages published in broadsheet format since the majority of them were composed of four pages only.

## Introduction

### *Scope of the thesis*

The subject of this thesis is Armenian literary criticism of the diaspora, which brings under scrutiny Armenian literature produced in the many geographical spaces of the diaspora. Both came into being as a result of the forced dispersion of the Armenian people in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis brings under the spotlight the crucial formative years of post-Genocide diasporan literature which extend over the ten years from around 1919 to 1928. There is no specific date or literary work or any kind of publication or literary activity which would designate the dawn of Armenian literature in the diaspora. Its genesis is closely linked to two activities: the literary activities which took place after Armistice in Constantinople and Smyrna, and the printed press of diaspora which played an important role in promoting Armenian literature in the post-Genocide period. I take 1919 as a starting point and I link it to the publication of the literary periodical *Adroushan* [Pagan Temple] (Izmir, 7 issues), because it underscores the importance of the revival of Armenian literature. From 1922 onwards the first generation of diasporan Armenian writers, especially the French wing, came on to the literary scene. The publication of two literary works heralded the beginning of a new era of Armenian literature in Western Armenian in the diaspora: firstly the book of collected poems *Anchrbedi Mé Kravoumé* [The Conquest of a Space] by Nigoghos Sarafian in 1928 and secondly the novel *Nahanché Arants Yerki* [Retreat without Song] in 1929, both published in Paris (on both works see Chapter Three). These two literary productions set the tone of the new writers and gave them a distinct generational voice with its underlying social, political and cultural issues. Therefore by 1928 the first phase in the literary individuality of the new writers had already been formed.

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<sup>1</sup> There is an array of literature on the Genocide, but the reader may find the following selection from mainstream works instructive: "The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from Anatolia to the Balkans to the Caucasus", Vahakn N. Dadrian, Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995; "The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians", Donald Bloxham, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; "A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility", Taner Akcam, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006; "Le Génocide des Arméniens", Raymond H. Kevorkian, Paris : Odile Jacob, 2006.



The other works which were published during this transitional period were *Albom Hekiatnerou* [Album of Fairy Tales] by Shavarsh Nartouni (Paris, 1927), *Sitonna* (Paris, 1928) by Nshan Beshigtashlian, *Haladzvadzneré (Portsé)* [The Persecuted (The Attempt)] by Zareh Vorpouni (Paris, 1929), *Aykahantes* [Celebration of Dawn] by Puzant Topalian (Aleppo, 1930), and others. 1929 was also the date of the publication of the respected literary periodical *Zvartnots* [Home of the Guardians] by Hrand Palouyian. Another noteworthy publication was the outcome of the gathering of Parisian writers, namely the short-lived literary periodical *Menk* [We] (1931-1932, Paris). This was one of the unique gatherings of Armenian writers which marked the end of an era. After this final phase the individuality of the new diasporan writers had been established.<sup>2</sup> The scope of my research matches the above timeframe; accordingly the dates of the publications of my source materials except on a couple of occasions do not exceed the year 1928. I adhered to this strict self-imposed timeframe in order to underline the importance of the issues of this period and also to limit the materials and avoid the temptation to make the scope of the research too broad.

### ***Printed press-based research***

The Armenian printed press was begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in diaspora. It was associated with Madras, where Rev. Haroutyun Shmavonian published the first Armenian journal *Aztarar* [Monitor] in 1794 both in vernacular and *krapar* (classical Armenian). Since then a large number of journals and periodicals were published. The focus of my thesis is on the post-Genocide printed press of the diaspora. In the formative years of the diasporan literature the literary critical materials were mainly published in the form of articles in the printed press. Only a few critical works were published in book format, such as *Kragan Temker* [Literary Figures] by Hovhanes Avakian (New York, 1925), and the two volumes of *Temker* [Portraits] (Paris, 1924, 1929) by Arshag Chobanian. This thesis is based on the critical materials published in the post-Genocide printed press of the Armenian diaspora during the years 1919-1928.

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<sup>2</sup> On the importance of this publication, see “Un Tentative de Communauté Littéraire: La Revue Menk”, Krikor Baladian (Beledian), “Revue du Monde Arménien”, tome 2, pp. 61-90, Paris, 1995-1996.

### *The linguistic parameters*

The Western Armenian language is the main criterion of choice for the source materials. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, Western Armenian was the “official” language of the diaspora and was also therefore of the written language, and secondly, Armenian literature in diaspora was mainly cultivated in Western Armenian because the majority of writers and critics were Western Armenians from Constantinople, Armenian provinces and other settlements in Turkey.

### *The term spyurk*

The designation of the literature produced in the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora<sup>3</sup> is called *spyurkahay kraganoutyun* [Armenian literature of the diaspora], which denotes the literature produced in the Armenian diaspora by Armenian writers in the Armenian language. The designation of the same literature as “the literature of the Armenian diaspora” is too broad conceptually, for it would incorporate literature produced in the diaspora by Armenian writers in any language.<sup>4</sup> The word *spyurk* literally means “dispersion” or “scattering” from the verb *sprel*, which means “to disperse” or “to scatter”.

The early mention of the term *spyurk* [diaspora] dates back to the translation of the Armenian Bible<sup>5</sup> in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Catholicos and poet Nerses Shnorhali used the term with a meaning similar to the contemporary usage. He paints the picture of Armenians who “are scattered in cities, castles, villages and farms in every corner of the earth”.<sup>6</sup> In 1923 Vahan Tekeyian wrote a poem named *Spyurk*, which was probably published in the printed press. In 1924 Yervant Oadian used the non-Armenian term in the title of one of his writings *Hay Diasporan* [The Armenian Diaspora].<sup>7</sup> One of Hagop Oshagan’s critical works was entitled *Spyurké Yev Irav Panasdeghdzoutyuné (V. Tekeyiani Aritov)* [Diaspora and Authentic Poetry (The Case of V. Tekeyian)], and was published in 1945. The term gained wide currency after the publication of the literary weekly *Spyurk* in Beirut (1958-1975; 1978).

<sup>3</sup> The term diaspora is derived from the Greek word “diaspora”; the Latin word is “dispersio”.

<sup>4</sup> Krikor Beledian makes a similar observation in his seminal work “Cinquante Ans ...” (see below), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> See “Letter of James”, chapter 1, verse 1; “First Letter of Peter”, chapter 1, verse 1.

<sup>6</sup> As cited in “Armenian Minority Experience in the Modern Arab World”, Ara Sanjian, “Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies”, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 177, Spring/Summer, Amman, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> See *Arev* [Sun], no. 1717, 18<sup>th</sup> October, Alexandria, 1924.

The Armenian settlements outside of the homeland are called *kaghout*,<sup>8</sup> from where derived the verb *kaghtel* [to migrate]. It is very important to mention that until the word *spyurk* gained currency, Armenians employed the word *kaghtashkharh* [literally “migrant world” or “émigré settlements”] with the meaning of “diaspora”. In the first decades of the post-Genocide diaspora the literature which was produced outside of the homeland was referred to as *kaghoutahay kraganoutyun* [literally “Armenian literature of colony”, or “Armenian émigré literature”]. It should be noted, however, that the word “émigré” has political connotations often denoting the involuntary departure from one’s homeland. In this thesis I employ the terms “diaspora” and “diasporan” for the designated period of 1919-1928.

### *Other terminological concerns*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in both the Armenian literary critical discourses and the nationalist rhetoric some terms were used with a vague meaning, especially those which designated a group of people sharing the same language, religion and culture. Those terms were *azk* [nation], *azkayin* [national], *tsegh* [race], *tseghayin* [racial] and *dohmig* or *dohmayin* [ethnic]. In the source materials for this thesis they are used without full definition of their meaning. The confusion was due to insufficient understanding of these terms in the sociological sense of the words as academia understands them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These were not scholarly writings and the target audience was the readership of the printed press. These terms in the majority of instances were used in a similar context, one substituting the other and as a result they were not perceived to be separate and sometimes meanings overlapped. For instance in the manifesto of *Mehian*<sup>9</sup> the terms “ethnic” [*dohmig*, *dohmayin*] and “racial” [*tseghayin*] were used in the same page with a similar meaning. In the case of the term “nation” [*azk*] and the adjective “national” [*azkayin*] their meaning was very abstract for the Armenian polemicist in diaspora. The “nation” should not be perceived in a sense as a nation state within certain boundaries; we are dealing with a stateless “nation” which perceives itself as such because this status was the guarantee of its survival and progress. These terms which were used so often designated the moral and cultural values of Armenians.

<sup>8</sup> This derives from the Hebrew word *galut*, meaning “colony” or “settlements out of homeland”.

<sup>9</sup> See *Mer Hankanagé* [Our Manifesto], *Mehian* [Pagan Temple], no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> January, p. 2, Constantinople, 1914.

### *Pre-Genocide diaspora*

The Armenians have lived in their homeland for over 2600 years. Historical Armenia was situated between the Pontus Mountains to the north, the Taurus Mountains to the south, the rivers Kur and Arax to the east and the Euphrates to the west.<sup>10</sup> Present-day Armenia stretches roughly from eastern Turkey to western Azerbaijan and from southern Georgia to northern Iran.

The Armenian diaspora<sup>11</sup> existed from ancient times and there is recorded evidence of an Armenian presence in the Byzantine Empire, Western and Eastern Europe, Georgia, Iran, India and the Far East.<sup>12</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> century forced displacements carried out by the Byzantines and Seljuk persecutions drove many Armenians away from their homeland. As a result of this mass migration a new Armenian state was established in Cilicia, which lasted until 1375. By the fall of this last Armenian kingdom the Armenians lost their independence. This mass migration coupled with other factors brought into being new Armenian communities in different parts of the world. Of these, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century two centres became significant as the Armenians' main cultural centres, namely Tiflis for Eastern Armenians in the Tsarist Russian Empire and Constantinople and to a lesser extent Smyrna for Western Armenians in Ottoman Turkey. For my purposes I will concentrate on Constantinople, where the Armenian religious, financial and political power was concentrated.

The social dynamics of Armenians in Constantinople were of a peculiar and intricate nature. The community was granted a system of self-rule known as *millet*; according to this Armenians within the Ottoman Empire represented a denomination which was ministered by the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Therefore the whole state of affairs of Ottoman Armenians was administered from Constantinople. Practically, however, the Patriarch was not an absolute power. There was an enormously influential class of affluent

<sup>10</sup> For a brief survey of Armenian history and corresponding maps see "Armenia: A Historical Atlas", Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> On the history of the Armenian diaspora see *Hamarod Ourvakidz Hay Kaghtavayrerer Badmoutian* [A Concise Outline of the History of Armenian Colonies], A. K. Aprahamian, vol. I, Yerevan: Haybedhrad, 1964; vol. II, Yerevan: Hayasdan, 1967; *Badmoutyun Hay Kaghtaganoutian* [A History of Armenian Immigration], Arshag Alboyajian, Cairo, vol. I, 1941; vol. II, 1955; vol. III, 1961; *Hay Spyurk: Hanrakidaran* [Armenian Diaspora: Encycloepedia], Hovhannes Ayzazian, Yerevan, 2003; "La Grande Diaspora Arménienne (XIX-XXI Siècle)", Aida Boudjikianian, pp. 819-903, in "Histoire Du Peuple Arménienne", Gérard Dédéyan (ed.), Toulouse: Edition Privat, 2007. "Les Colonies Arméniennes, Des Origins à La Fin Du XVIII Siècle", B. L. Zékiyan, pp. 425-446, in "Histoire Du Peuple Arménienne", Gérard Dédéyan (ed.), Toulouse: Edition Privat, 2007; "La Longue Marche Des Arméniens: Histoire Et Devenir D'une Diaspora", Laurence Ritter, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See Ara Sanjian, "The Armenian Minority Experience in the Modern Arab World", loc. cit., p. 150.

entrepreneurs known as *amiras*<sup>13</sup> who wielded great power in administering community affairs. This group came into prominence through their connections with the Ottoman court and many were in the service of the sultan executing monopolised duties. Constantinople was also the hub of the cultural activities of Western Armenians, especially of the printed press and literature. The newspapers such as *Masis* (1852-1908), *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (1870-1896), *Arevelk* [East] (1884-1896; 1898-1912) and others shaped the views of Armenians in many domains. As far as literature was concerned Constantinople was the main centre of Western Armenian literature because it was where the majority of the writers were concentrated, such as Bedros Tourian, Mgrdich Beshigtashlian, Taniel Varouzhan, Krikor Zohrab, Yeroukhan and others. Smyrna was another cultural centre for the Western Armenians although it should be stressed that compared to Constantinople as the main centre its status in terms of political and financial power and cultural contribution was modest. Apart from these centres the majority of the Armenian population was concentrated in the provinces of mainland Armenia (eastern *villayets*) in Ottoman Turkey. In this kind of situation provincial Armenians were overlooked by their brethren in the centres, which resulted in a mistrust of Constantinople.

Although Constantinople, Tiflis and other cultural centres were not geographically part of Armenia they were not perceived as part of the pre-Genocide diaspora either. In the case of Constantinople it was an integral part of Armenian life for four hundred years. Both cities were centres where important decisions were made; however for some pre-Genocide intellectuals and writers such as Roupen Zartarian and Ardashes Haroutyunian to name a few, Constantinople, although an important centre, could not replace the homeland, where the undistorted “ethnic”<sup>14</sup> values were preserved. These values would comprise the ethos, the cultural heritage and religious beliefs of the Armenian people. According to them the Armenian milieu in Constantinople was Europeanised and therefore it represented a distorted picture of Armenian life (this matter will be treated later).

In the pre-Genocide period Armenian communities were formed across the world such as in India, Singapore, Egypt, France and USA just to name a few. The figures of the Armenian population of these communities were nowhere near the figures of the post-Genocide diaspora. In these communities there was a degree of organised cultural and religious activity

<sup>13</sup> The word *amira* has its roots in the Arabic word *amir*, meaning “chief”. On this subject, see “The Amira Class of Istanbul”, Hagop L. Barsoumian, Yerevan: American University of Armenia, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow this term from the debates in *Nor Sharzhoum* [New Movement], Cairo, 1923-1924. I will use it throughout this thesis to denote the values of a certain ethnic group, namely Armenians.

as well as of infrastructure. Paris was the significant centre in Europe, where from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there was a permanent presence of students from Constantinople and Smyrna who played an important role in the cultural life of the community. Of these, Sdepan Vosgan was an energetic young man from Smyrna with liberal views who published the periodicals *Arevelk* [East] (1855-1856, Paris) and *Arevmoudk* [West] (1859; 1864-1865, Paris). During the Hamidian persecutions some Armenian writers from Constantinople took refuge in Paris, such as Arshag Chobanian, a prominent Western Armenian critic; he published the literary periodical *Anahid* (1898-1911, Paris). In the Middle East Cairo was another centre of the pre-Genocide diaspora, where religious and educational institutions existed. Boghos Noubar Pasha was a prominent Armenian politician and philanthropist who held very high political positions in the country (see Chapter One). The two significant newspapers in the diaspora, namely *Housaper* [Hope Deliverer] (1913-present) and *Arev* [Sun] (1915-1924, Alexandria; 1924-present, Cairo) were published in Egypt. In many cities in the USA such as New York, Boston, Los Angeles and Fresno the cultural production of the Armenian communities in the pre-Genocide period was modest. This was due to the fact that they were newly formed and in the process of establishing themselves. That said there were vigorous efforts in the publication of the printed press. One of the driving forces was Hayg Eginian, whose name was closely connected to the publication of many journals such as *Arekag* [Sun] (1888, West Hoboken), *Sourhantag* [Courier] (1889-1890, New York, West Hoboken) and *Nor Serount* [New Generation] (1909, Fresno).

Here it should be emphasised that during the pre-Genocide period Constantinople always had a leading role as the main centre of literary and cultural production. Therefore a long time before the Genocide of 1915-1918 (according to some historians it lasted until 1923) the Armenian communities in the diaspora were actively engaged in cultural activities in order to maintain their “ethnic” consciousness, which was based on common language, religion and culture.

In order to complete the cycle of historical events it is important to mention the birth of the independent Republic of Armenia in 1918. Since the fall of the Cilician Kingdom in 1375, for six hundred years the Armenians were deprived of mastering their own fate. Independence was an occasion of great pride, which had its impact on the formation of the Armenian diasporan identity. In 1920 Armenia became part of the Soviet Union in the territory of a small fragment of what once was referred to as “historical Armenia”.

*Post-Genocide diaspora*

The Genocide has completely changed the meaning of what it is to be in diaspora for Armenians. The influx of refugees swept first the Armenian communities in the Middle East and the Balkans, then Europe and North and South America. A whole new set of political and cultural dynamics came into play, determining the new diasporan life and consequently the meaning of the diaspora was completely changed. In the pre-Genocide period it was a temporary place. Armenians emigrated from their country for different reasons, be that political, economic or otherwise, and they had the hope of return whenever they chose. Conversely in the post-Genocide period Armenians were expellees, they lost their homeland and the doors of return were closed forever. This sudden change in the course of Armenian history created new challenges for the survival and preservation of identity, especially in the absence of its main foothold, the homeland. However, in the first two decades after the Genocide refugees kept alive the hope of return. In the absence of a homeland to maintain their unique identity, Armenians in the diaspora had to rely on the three nourishing elements of Armenian identity: language, religion and culture. Of these, culture, specifically literature, had a great role to play: it would serve as a buttress against the looming dangers of alienation and assimilation. It would also enhance the sense of belonging of Armenians, thus facilitating the construction of a cultural identity in the diaspora. In this context literary criticism tried to create a framework which would correspond to the needs of Armenians in diaspora conditions. In other words as far as criticism was concerned literature had to serve certain purposes, which was the construction of the Armenian identity for the generations to come. A number of critics from the old and new generations brought their contributions to the debates concerning these issues in the period 1919-1928. Hagop Sirouni, Kourken Mkhitarian, Zabel Yesayian, Hagop Oshagan, Levon Shant, Garo Sasouni, Nshan Desdegyul and other critics of the older generation were instrumental in promoting literature and setting the literary agenda. Peniamin Tashian, Vazken Shoushanian, Nigoghos Sarafian and Hrand Palouyian and other new critics and writers reacted to the literary views of the older generation, or promoted their vision for the future direction of diasporan literature.

Because of insufficient materials at my disposal it is difficult to make judgements about the pre-Genocide writings of these writers and the critics published in the printed press, let alone comparing them with their post-Genocide writings. Some of the senior critics were well-known Armenian literary figures. Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948) was a prose writer and

critic with a refined taste. Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943) was a prose writer and political activist and she went to great lengths to house the refugees and the orphans of the Genocide. Levon Shant (1869-1951) was a well-known prose writer and playwright and political activist; he was a member of the Armenian parliament in 1919 before becoming its president. In 1920 he went to Moscow with a delegation to negotiate with Soviet authorities. Hogop Sirouni (1890-1973) was a poet, critic, political activist and publisher. He was a well-known figure in the Constantinople literary circles and enjoyed great respect in the diaspora. Garo Sasouni (1889-1977) was more known as a political activist with nationalist leanings than as a prose writer and critic. Due to his younger age Kourken Mkhitarian (1890-1962) was a lesser-known figure in Constantinople. In diaspora his role was instrumental in promoting literature and he was also the initiator of the debate on the future direction of Armenian literature in the diaspora in *Nor Sharzhoun* in 1923. Peniamin Tashian (1896-1971) bridged the two generations; he was younger than the youngest members of the older generation and the eldest member of the new writers. At the age of 27 he emigrated to Egypt, where he published critical materials in the printed media. He was also a political activist and editor. Nigoghos Sarafian (1902-1972) was one of the renowned poets of his generation; Vazken Shoushanian (1903-1941) was a prose writer; Hrand Palouyian (1904-1968) was a literary and art critic as well as a publisher. This new generation of Armenian literature of the diaspora came on to the scene in the mid 1920s and by the end of the same decade these writers had made a significant contribution to the debates and discourses of the time.

### ***Western Armenianness of the diaspora***

As we have talked about “ethnic” identity it is important also to consider the cultural identity of diaspora and the way that Western Armenian came to be the defining element of the cultural face of diaspora. On the eve of the First World War the Armenian homeland was divided into Western Armenia under Ottoman rule and Eastern Armenia under Russian rule. This created two different social, political and cultural orbits with two separate dialects spoken in the two main Armenian cultural centres: Constantinople for Western Armenians and Tiflis for Eastern Armenians. Although both of these cultural centres were not geographically part of Armenia they were neither perceived as part of the homeland nor as diasporan centres. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries some intellectuals perceived Constantinople as a centre for Armenians in Ottoman Turkey where Armenian life and



culture was burgeoning. For others Constantinople was a decadent environment where the indulgence of power and wealth were the reason for the total contempt and disregard towards the population of the Armenian provinces and this line of thought continued for at least a decade after the Genocide (this matter will be treated later). The fact remains that Constantinople was the main centre for the production of Western Armenian culture together with Tiflis for Eastern Armenian culture.

This parallel development of two cultures, sharing the same cultural roots, was halted by the tragic events which took their course from 1915 onwards. The Genocide was directed against the Armenian population of Ottoman Turkey which fell within the Western Armenian cultural orbit. In this way Western Armenian culture, and specifically its language, acquired the “official” status of the diaspora. The diasporan Armenians became the inheritors of that cultural tradition, then under threat of extinction, and regarded themselves as its guardians.

The Western Armenian orientation of the diaspora was not merely supported by the fact that the diaspora was formed by Western Armenian refugees. There were two other factors which contributed to the consolidation of that identity. Firstly, Western Armenian culture was the victim of violence itself, and therefore the remnants of that culture were dearly preserved. An unreserved reverence was created around those writers who were victims of the Genocide, individuals who set the example of the ultimate sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> The literature of these writers was produced in the Western Armenian language and this eventually led to the canonisation of their literary texts. The new generation were enjoined by an earlier generation of writers to show the utmost reverence towards their memory and to follow their path of ideals.<sup>16</sup> Any unfavourable evaluation of their literature would be considered sacrilege.

In addition to this a considerable number of Western Armenian intellectuals, mainly from Constantinople, Smyrna and other parts of Ottoman Turkey, took refuge in different diasporan communities and, promoting Western Armenian literature, language and culture, bridged the pre- and post-Genocide generations. The Western Armenian creative drive had violently ceased and the task of re-constructing that creative tradition was assumed by these intellectuals. Their efforts also brought into existence the diasporan printed press and a

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<sup>15</sup> See the following editorials, *Anhedatsadz Kragan Serount Mé Yev ‘Pyunig’* [A Perished Literary Generation and the “Phoenix”], editorial, *Pyunig* [Phoenix], no. 8, August, pp. 1185-1186, Boston, 1919. *Yergou Khosk* [Brief Words], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> January, pp. 62-63, New York, 1922. *1915 Abril-1925 Abril* [1915 April-1925 April], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 2, April, p. 33, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>16</sup> *Anhedatsadz Kragan Serounté Yev ‘Pyunig’*, loc. cit.

considerable number of texts were printed in the Western Armenian language. This language, previously under threat of extinction, began to be revived, becoming the most important instrument and component in the formation of the Armenian diasporan identity from Buenos Aires to Montreal and from Canberra to Addis Ababa.

The Western Armenian language became the most important component of Armenian identity in the diaspora. Until this time the main medium of communication for Armenian refugees had been Turkish along with the local dialects of the areas from which they had come. The adoption of Western Armenian as the criterion by which communities could identify themselves encouraged a sense of solidarity that differentiated members from outsiders and from “Other” Armenians, effectively the speakers of Eastern Armenian from the homeland (the Armenian SSR) and from Iran. At this time the schools in diaspora also played a crucial role in promoting the “official” language. The great majority of these schools, along with the local educational curricula, adopted an additional Armenian component with Western Armenian at its core. Although illiteracy was extremely high among the refugees, through the sheer efforts of their children the Western Armenian language eventually became the literary language and vernacular of the diaspora.

### *Selecting critics and journals*

The selection of critics for this thesis was based on their participation in the literary critical discourses dedicated to the future direction of Armenian literature in the diaspora during the period 1919-1928. Neither their pre-Genocide critical contribution (this applies to the critics of the older generation) nor their stature in the critical domain were considered as criteria. As for the selection of the newspapers and periodicals, again it was based on their participation in the literary critical discourses regardless of the extent of their contribution. I also chose the journals and periodicals which published materials with close connection to my subject. These materials shed light on the range of issues discussed in this thesis. I tried to use different journals from different communities of the diaspora in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the responses to similar issues. Those periodicals and the newspapers I will identify as follows: *Adroushan* [Pagan Temple] (1919, Izmir); *Nor Sharzhoum* [New Movement] (1923-1924, Cairo); *Harach* [Forward] (1925-1940, 1945-present, Paris); *Navasart* (1923-1926, Bucharest); *Pyunig* [Phoenix] (1918-1920, Boston); *Hayasdani Gochnag* [Bell of Armenia] (1900-1968, Boston, New York); *Yerevan* (1925-

1930, Paris); *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (1899-1900, New York; 1900-1991, Boston, newspaper; from 1922-1970 it had a literary supplement known as *Hayrenik (Amsakir)* [Fatherland (Monthly)]); *Arev* [Sun] (Cairo); *Navasart* (1922, New York) (for complete list see Appendix).

### *The selection of the materials*

From the outset it needs to be stressed that some of the materials used in this thesis have not been brought into wider academic discussions. The most important criterion of selection for the materials was naturally their importance in contributing to the argument of surrounding the construction of the Armenian identity. I also considered articles which were written in Western Armenian during the years 1919-1928 although in a very few instances I chose articles beyond this chronological scope in order to show the continuation of certain ideas. Another criterion was the quality of the materials; therefore I had to sift through many articles in order to select the typical ones. I chose the articles which had a certain trajectory of the development of ideas because my intention was to demonstrate the formation of critical trends. I chose articles which were part of a whole ongoing debate. Such a case was the polemic between Kourken Mkhitarian and Peniamin Tashian throughout the publication of the literary periodical *Nor Sharzhoum* (1923-1924, Cairo, 52 issues). I also chose single articles which contributed significantly to important debates. Such an example is the article of Nigoghos Sarafian, namely *Mdadzoumner* [Reflections], which marked the dawn of a new era with its innovative ideas. I chose the materials which epitomised schools of thinking; such a selection was the debate between Garo Sasouni and Hrand Palouyian in *Harach* in 1928. The former was representative of the nationalist school of thought while the latter was one of the young voices who advocated innovative ideas. I also incorporated the articles which would give a clearer insight into certain aspects of my thesis.

### *Comprehensive works on diaspora literature*

The first effort to bring together the first generation of diasporan writers in book format belongs to Minas Teoleolian. He gives a panoramic view of Armenian literature of the diaspora and Soviet Armenia in the second volume of his anthology *Tar Mé Kraganoutyun 1850-1950* [A Century of Literature 1850-1950] (vol. 2, 1956). In the fifty-page introduction

he outlines the general mood, the literary trends and the achievements of the first generation of writers. Each literary piece is followed by a brief biography of the writer and a critical evaluation of his or her literature. He has no intention of writing a literary history but to produce a work or companion to the contemporary literature for students and the readership at large. His evaluations and observations are acute, though it is worth mentioning that Teoleolian does not show the same generosity in his critical evaluations to the diasporan writers from the pro-Soviet Armenian camp as much as to the writers with close affiliation with the ARF party, of which he was a member.<sup>17</sup>

The first comprehensive work is Kegham Sevan's two volumes (second volume published posthumously) *Spyurkahay Kraganoutian Badmoutian Ourvakdzer* [Outlines of a History of Armenian Literature in the Diaspora] (vol. 1, 1980 and vol. 2, 1997). This enterprise is below the accepted standard of a scholarly work and tainted by the generic biased attitude of Soviet Armenian criticism toward ideological opponents, namely the writers closely affiliated with the ARF party.<sup>18</sup>

Vazken Kaprielian's work *Spyurkahay Kraganoutyun* [Armenian Literature of Diaspora] (1987) was the second enterprise in Soviet Armenia to write the literary history of the diaspora. He outlines the six decades of literary production of the diaspora from the 1920s onwards. It bears the symptomatic ideological footprints of the official policy of Soviet Armenia towards its opponents in diaspora. However, compared to Kegham Sevan's diatribes against some writers Kaprielian's attacks are toned down and in line with the party guidelines for evaluating diasporan literature.<sup>19</sup> It is a work of certain merit, its target readership being university students and literati at large.

The "Reference Guide to Modern Armenian Literature 1500-1920" (2000) authored by Kevork B. Bardakjian also briefly outlines the literature of diaspora followed by a short evaluation of the literary work of a handful of diasporan writers (see pages 230-252).

In this field Krikor Beledian's seminal work *Cinquante Ans de Littérature Arménienne en France: Du Même à l'Autre* (Paris: CNRS Edition, 2001) is dedicated only to French Armenian literature and in terms of erudition it remains unparalleled. It is an in-depth

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<sup>17</sup> He is very ungenerous in his assessment of the poetry of Vahé Vahian (from the pro-Soviet Armenian camp, see pp. 226-227). He ignores the literary assessment of A. Sema's poetry (pp. 244-245). He completely ignores Vahé Hayg and Antranig Antreasian by not including their names in the anthology. On the other hand, he dedicates some pages to his ideological comrade Garo Sasouni (pp. 69-72), who had a modest input into Armenian literature of diaspora, compared to the above-mentioned names.

<sup>18</sup> For an example, see the critical assessment on Shavarsh Nartouni's literature in vol. 1, pp. 74-85.

<sup>19</sup> For an example, see the introduction of *Spyurkahay Kraganoutyun*, Yerevan: Publication of State University of Yerevan, 1987, pp. 3-39.

methodical analysis and evaluation of 1922-1972 French Armenian literature. He divides French Armenian literature into five periods, the first phase of which he designates as the formative years from 1922 to 1928.

It is also worth remembering the two treatises of Hagop Oshagan, namely *Spyurké Yev Irav Panasdeghdzoutyuné (V. Tekeyiani Aritov)* (1945) and *Vgayoutyun Mé* [A Testimony] (1946). The former was an in-depth evaluation of Vahan Tekeyian's poetry; in this context Oshagan scrutinises the Western Armenian poetic traditions and briefly outlines the diasporan poetic trends and Tekeyian's influence upon it. The latter is another critical effort, which was written on the occasion of the publication of Antranig Dzarougian's long poem *Tought Ar Yerevan* [Letter to Yerevan] (1946); he scrutinises the poetry written in Western Armenian. Neither of these two works is intended to give a panoramic view of diasporan literature.

### *Works on Armenian literary criticism*

Armenian literary criticism of the diaspora is the least explored field of Armenian studies. Any work which comprehensively or even partially evaluates the literary critical endeavours, as far as I am aware, is nonexistent. In the Armenian literary tradition literary criticism has not been cultivated in earnest as much as poetry or prose, especially in its theoretical aspects. Being methodical was not common practice either in the evaluation of literary works or in the critical issues. However, there is a considerable amount of critical production on Armenian literary criticism of the pre-Genocide period of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly in the form of articles and to a lesser extent in book format on the different aspects of Western, Eastern and Soviet Armenian literary criticism.

In the post-Genocide period in diaspora the name of Hagop Oshagan (see Appendix) became a byword for Armenian literary criticism. His dominant intellectual stature and unparalleled reputation as a harsh critic earned him respect and animosity in equal measure. Having said that, even Oshagan as a critic has not been examined at length.<sup>20</sup> The same treatment was shown to him by Soviet Armenian criticism for political reasons.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Krikor Beledian is one of the critics who wrote in-depth treatises on Oshagan. See the last part of his seminal work *Mard*, Antelias: Publication of Kevork Melidinetzi Prize-Number 29, publishing house of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1997. Also see "Hagop Oshagan: Critic", "Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies", no. 3, pp. 129-145, Dearborn, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> He was and still is a hated figure in Armenia. This is due to his harsh criticism of some of the much-revered literary figures of Soviet Armenia.

### *The works*

The first comprehensive two-volume anthology in this domain, *Hay Kragan Knnatadoutian Kresdomadya* [Anthology of Armenian Literary Criticism] (vol. 1, 1981 and vol. 2, 1984), was published in Armenia. The wide definition of the term “criticism” allows the editor Hrant Tamrazian and compiler Zhenya Kalantarian to take the 5<sup>th</sup> century as a starting point for Armenian literary criticism, which then stretches to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction written by Hrant Tamrazian is a quick glance into Armenian literary criticism and lacks deep analysis.

The first comprehensive effort to write the history of Armenian literary criticism belongs to Zhenya Kalantarian. Her work *Hay Kraganakidoutian Badmoutyun* [The History of Armenian Literary Criticism] (1986) is an erudite endeavour although it bears some of the hallmark of the Marxist ideological approach. This work covers the period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In this domain the publication of the two sizeable volumes *Hay Knnatadoutian Badmoutyun* [History of Armenian Criticism] (vol. 1, 1985 and vol. 2, 1998) is significant although many aspects of literature are analysed from the Marxist point of view. This work covers Armenian criticism from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This could be recommended as a general companion to Armenian literary criticism. None of these works touches upon the subject or the issues concerning literary criticism of the diaspora.

### *The importance of this thesis*

Any enterprise which explores the literary criticism of any literary tradition enhances knowledge of the given literature and gives an insight into its spiritual and intellectual dynamics. In addition to the literature itself it is a source for understanding that literature. In this sense the appraisal of Armenian literary criticism of the diaspora sheds vital light on the post-Genocide dynamics of the diasporan literature.

Personally, as a diasporan Armenian and inheritor of Western Armenian language and culture it was my heartfelt duty to bring my modest contribution to this domain of academic inquiry. This would also enhance my knowledge about the formation of the Armenian diasporan identity, which would help me understand the dynamics of the Armenian diaspora, something of which I am a part. Over the years doing my research, which I have conducted

intermittently, I have noticed a huge gap in the domain of diasporan Armenian literary criticism. Since then the idea of a research project was born, which gradually developed until it took the form of this thesis.

Is it possible to talk of an area of intellectual inquiry known as “Armenian literary criticism of the diaspora”? During my research I was faced with this question even by respected writers and critics. My answer is emphatically “yes”, as the briefest consultation of the printed press would convince even the committed sceptic. No matter how modest it is with its aesthetic, philosophical and theoretical inquiries it is still worthy of exploration, especially when it comes to reconstructing the intellectual topography of a crucial period as is the case with the post-Genocide diaspora from 1919 to 1928. This was the period when Armenians were under immense pressure to rebuild their ruined cultural habitat. I also chose this subject in order to demonstrate the concerted efforts of the people of letters in overcoming enormous obstacles to create a cultural framework within which Armenian identity could be preserved.

Therefore, to my knowledge at least, this thesis is the first modest attempt to put under the spotlight this period of the history of not only Armenian literature and criticism, but also the efforts to rebuild the intellectual edifice of the Armenians. In this sense it fills a gap in the field of Armenian literary studies – as I discussed above there are some works on Armenian literature of the diaspora but none on its criticism. During my research I have not come across any work that examines the above-designated period of diasporan literary criticism or any other aspect of it. I hope this modest effort will not be the last.

### *Objectives*

In the context of the national catastrophe many important research questions from the point of view of diasporan literary criticism are raised in this thesis. In the post-Genocide situation what was the perception of literature? What was the role of literature as perceived by critics in maintaining Armenian identity and “ethnic” survival? How did the Genocide affect the formation of certain arguments in literary criticism? In the absence of the homeland, was it possible to cultivate literature? Where was the Armenianness in the literature?

These questions will be answered by scrutinising the circumstances in which the new literature in diaspora came into being in the framework of literary criticism. I will achieve

this objective by examining literary critical debates and the connected discourses in order to show the ongoing fermentation in the literary critical scene. This will give a clear insight into the cultural dynamics of a “nation” stricken by a great calamity.

These debates, with their distinct polemical content, shaped the future character of diasporan literature and set the direction for future literary activities. In a sense this work is also a kind of history of the formative years of Armenian literature of the diaspora, a by-product if it is possible to say of the modest effort to display the dynamics of diasporan criticism.

### *Methodology*

The success of any intellectual enterprise is contingent upon efficient organisation, hence the adoption of a methodology helps not only for the organisation of source materials but also for the organisation of the critique itself. For the organisation of this thesis I employed the historical approach. The organisation of the source materials from an historical perspective has two benefits: firstly, the evaluation of the discourses in chronological order, taking phase after phase, helps to expose the trajectory of the development of the literary critical ideas that are propagated in the critical debates, thus enhancing the knowledge of the given subject; secondly, it limits the amount of research and focuses on the scrutiny of the source materials within a definite timeframe. The lack of certain chronological boundaries would lead to unnecessary expansion, which would create confusion and difficulties.

Another method I employed was to organise the writing (except Chapters One to Three, the historical part) around ideas rather than individual critics. I identified the strands of critical thought, the discourses and the recurrent ideas in Armenian literary criticism of the diaspora, organised under headings and scrutinised at length. This kind of methodological approach helps to expose the development of the critical ideas as well as to avoid unnecessary repetition. Had the subject matter been organised around each individual critic, the same ideas would circulate time and again, thus weakening the writing. Furthermore, by bringing together some aspects of the debate within a certain logical systematisation allows all of the relevant issues to be treated once and for all.



### *Organisation of the thesis*

This thesis consists of seven chapters, each one pursuing a range of issues but inherently connected to the main body of the writing. They are designed to accommodate different aspects of the writing and they discuss all the relevant issues concerning literature and its role in the post-Genocide diaspora.

The thesis has two main parts, an historical and a critical. The first includes the first three chapters and draws the historical picture of the post-Genocide situation of the diaspora, which is designed to draw the context in which the literary critical discourses took place and the second concentrates on the critical discourses.

#### Chapter One

The aim of this chapter is to draw the picture of the cultural framework and provide the necessary informational tools to explain certain aspects of the future literary activities. It discusses the following five issues: a) the formation of the main post-Genocide diasporan centres, which were the hub of the cultural and specifically literary activities; b) the re-establishment of Armenian institutions in the diaspora, especially the discourse which underscored the importance of educational institutions (these would be the bastion of Armenian identity and would educate the next generation of Armenians); c) the political divisions and their impact on diasporan culture; d) the challenges that Armenian identity faced in the alien world.

#### Chapter Two

Since the source materials of this thesis are taken from the printed press of the Armenian diaspora written in Western Armenian, naturally it is indispensable to dedicate a chapter to the printed press. This chapter pursues three objectives: a) to outline the nature of Western Armenian journalism, its traditions and its contribution to the re-establishment of literary journalism; b) to introduce the main figures in the publication of relevant periodicals and journals, such as editors; c) to introduce the main participants of the literary critical debates; d) to give the aesthetic principles by which Western Armenian and diasporan writers and literary critics were influenced.

### Chapter Three

The third chapter continues to delineate the historical circumstances that brought Armenian literature of the diaspora into being. It gives the account of the resilience of the people active in the cultural milieu in the aftermath of the Genocide. The efforts of reorganisation had paramount importance. This chapter also very briefly touches upon readership and literature in the diaspora, as well as the logistical side of the issue, such as the availability of books in Armenian communities. This is designed to give a comprehensive picture of diasporan Armenians in the early 1920s. It is an effort to underline the culture of reading and the reading habits of Armenians, something which the existence and development of literature were contingent upon.

### Chapter Four

This chapter discusses the different perceptions of literature by Armenian literary critics in the context of post-Genocide “ethnic” survival. This intends to demonstrate the way in which literature was manipulated for certain ends. It was not only an aesthetic enterprise but also a social and political one – a potent tool in achieving a variety of objectives.

### Chapter Five

Chapter Five is a prelude to the latter part (chapters Six and Seven) of the thesis as it shows the original sources of the discourses during the formative years of diasporan literature. Some of the recurrent ideas of the early 1920s date back to the literary discourses of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century pre-Genocide Armenian literary criticism of Constantinople. Of these, the main issue was the promotion of the Armenian “ethnic” character in the literary works of the writers. Therefore, the examination of the sources of pre-Genocide debates helps to understand the post-Genocide critical debates.

## Chapter Six

This chapter has great importance because it contains the bulk of the debates on the future direction of diasporan literature. At the heart of this discourse was the debate between Kourken Mkhitarian and Peniamin Tashian in the periodical *Nor Sharzhoun* [New Movement]. The debates were concentrated around four issues: a) the exposition of an Armenian milieu in the diasporan literature; b) the formulation of literary principles for the diasporan writers; c) the exposition of “ethnic” values in literature; and d) the feasibility of cultivating Armenian literature outside of the homeland. It needs to be mentioned that many critics such as Hogop Sirouni and Hrand Palouyian aired their views on these issues in different literary periodicals. As a result of these debates a distinctly nationalist literary critical trend can be observed which promoted exclusively Armenian literature bearing the fundamental “ethnic” values.

## Chapter Seven

The generational clash between older and young writers was the next phase in literary criticism. In this chapter the arguments are presented, first from the perspective of the older generation, which was harshly critical of the first literary harvest of the young writers: literary immaturity was cited as the main flaw of the new generation. There were however some sympathetic voices that showed understanding for the younger generation’s suffering and expressed optimism for the future. As a response to the onslaught of the older generation, Vazken Shoushanian and some other young writers spoke for their generation and defended their endeavours. In 1928 Vazken Shoushanian and another young writer, Nigoghos Sarafian, presented their views on the future direction of Armenian diasporan literature. They spell out their literary credo, which was innovative and bold and this heralded the arrival of the new generation on the literary scene. All these debates took place against the backdrop of the post-Genocide challenges to “ethnic” survival.

### *The roadmap of the thesis*

The Armenian diaspora, one of the oldest in history, became the permanent living space for survivors of the Genocide, which had a catastrophic effect on Armenians and gave a

completely new meaning to the diaspora. The new environments brought new challenges which would shape a new identity. The “ethnic” survival of Armenians was now under threat and they had to organise their communal life in the diaspora, establishing the social, political and cultural infrastructure required for the regeneration of their communities. The preservation of the Armenian “ethnic” identity and cultural heritage was of paramount importance and therefore all means were used to sustain it. The process of nation-building in the Western Armenian cultural centres of Constantinople and Smyrna had begun in the second half of the 19th century and came to an abrupt end in 1915 with the onset of Genocide. It took some time for communities to re-commence this process from where it had left off: this time they did not have a homeland and they had to reconstruct their shattered communal life within a completely new socio-political and cultural context.

In the post-Genocide dispersion after the dust of the war had settled and after the victims had been counted, Armenians had to face the agony of living in exile, away from their natural habitat; “ethnic” survival was the main challenge and with this end in view the reconstruction of the “nation” in dispersion started to gather pace. Along with physical survival, the importance of maintaining intellectual, spiritual and moral values as a means of survival was emphasised. These were seen as the principal components not only for the maintenance of the Armenian identity in diaspora but also in the reconstruction of the “nation”; they were the guarantee of the perpetuation of the “nation”. Armenian literature was seen as the repository of these values and its revitalisation had paramount importance. In consequence of this, intellectuals and writers had a crucial role to play and inactivity was not justified on any grounds. Historically Armenian literature has always perceived as a raft of salvation, especially in times of crisis and this time would not be any different.

In order to find a way out of the mayhem of the post-Genocide situation, Armenians in diaspora had to rethink their strategies either in political or artistic spheres. This meant that a huge effort of readjustment had to be made to fit into the new diasporan conditions. Accordingly, different artistic disciplines, especially the literature, had to serve to those purposes, in order to facilitate the survival and the maintenance of the Armenian identity. Therefore, the function of literature was variously reinterpreted. It was viewed as one of the crucial props of the intellectual and spiritual edifice upon which was based the “ethnic” existence of Armenians.

In this context many roles were assigned to literature. It was seen as educational, since the literature had an edifying factor for the refugees intellectually and emotionally. Its social

importance could not be overlooked: literature was an intrinsic part of life insofar as it was the reflection of it and a tool in order to shape it. Politically, as well, literature would shape the mindset of Armenians and create an atmosphere conducive to intensifying the desire for political independence. Armenians had contributed to the civilisation of humanity and so literature played a civilisational role. The continuation of that role through literature would provide reasons for dignified existence, thus contributing to the survival of the Armenian people. Literature was therefore seen as a means for survival. Firstly, literature consolidates the “ethnic” consciousness which would serve as barrier to the alien world, thus securing “ethnic” authenticity. Secondly, the experience of creativity in general and creative writing in particular had a crucial role in the “ethnic” survival to create a means to be in touch with emotional and intellectual spheres, the most important functions for a society. Additionally, literature had a therapeutic role for it was a means to channel the disappointment and frustration of the new generation to creativity. This would constitute the vengeance of the Armenian people (Desdegyul). Moreover literature was the space where lost homeland could be recreated. The main propagator of this idea was Desdegyul. The recreation of spiritual Armenia would evoke the image of the homeland, thus keeping alive the hope of return, something which could facilitate the survival of Armenians.

The multi-purpose perception of literature was indicative of the numerous urgent needs. It was a potent tool to shape every domain of life of the refugees. This was the utilitarian approach to literature and all these different aspects of it were designed for the betterment of the “nation”, which needed reconstruction on a massive scale.

The debates on the future direction of the literature began in earnest in the early 1920s in the literary periodical *Nor Sharzhoum*. The principal issues of the debate were: the formulation of literary principles; the exposition of the Armenian milieu; the exposition of “ethnic” values; and homeland-bound literature.

Firstly, one of the contributors of the debate of *Nor Sharzhoum*, H. Nalpantian, advocated the idea of the formulation of a set of literary principles which would lead the literary efforts of the new generation of writers. The rationale behind this kind of attitude was manifold. Partly it was to engineer a kind of literature which would contribute to the survival in diaspora and would forge the Armenian identity of the coming generation of writers. Apart from controlling the literary agenda this would also help to police the aesthetic and ideological spheres of young writers. This was designed to keep the literary activities of young writers within the “ethnic” boundaries of Armenian literature. Although the content

of those literary principles were not spelt out it was revealed through the arguments which were put forward in the different phases of this nationalist discourse.

The emergence of the ethnocentric view was rife not only in literature but the other spheres of social activity of the diasporan Armenians. The preoccupation with the preservation of the Armenian identity excluded all possible cultural interactions which could benefit Armenian culture. The reasons of the formation of this kind of attitude could be explained as a direct response to the catastrophe. There was an air of untrustworthiness towards the "Other" cultural values. In the case of the West this perception was rooted in the latest historical experience when in a time of great urgency the bearers of those cultural values have betrayed the Armenian people. As for the predominant Muslim East the natural barriers were erected. Additionally, in the aftermath of the Genocide uncertainty was commonplace and the best way to deal with this kind of situation was to adopt a cautious attitude towards the unknown world and its values.

The response of the new generation to the authoritative attitude of the old generation was feeble. At this early stage of diasporan Armenian literature the intellectual personalities of the new writers were not formed yet, therefore the response was limited. The young participant of the polemic, Tashian, rather half-heartedly rebuffed the patronage of the senior generation. For him the formation of any kind of literary future direction was tantamount to the imposition of a set of values, which would limit the artistic freedom of the writers. Yesayan also found the idea of the formulation of literary principals unhelpful, since this would hinder the development of the young writers.

Secondly, the cultivation of the Armenian milieu as subject matter in the Armenian literature of diaspora was another important issue which was propounded by Mkhitarian in *Nor Sharzhoum*. There was a degree of chronological confusion whether pre- or post-Genocide Armenian life was to be the subject of the depiction. Mkhitarian did not spell out this issue however his preference was pre-Genocide provincial life without ruling out the depiction of the post-Genocide life of refugees. The popularisation of literature was a crucial step that must be taken whereby the people must be brought closer to literature. In order to achieve such undertaking the writers had to depict Armenian life in literature: this would give the opportunity to the survivors to identify themselves with the literary texts. The interaction between two sides would contribute to the construction of the Armenian cultural identity and would solidify the foundation of the "nation". Tashian rebuffed the proposition of his opponent by arguing that the young writers have limited knowledge on the provincial life and

its values, and in the absence of the homeland it is impossible to create an “ethnic” literature, especially in an alien environment. Therefore, the literature dedicated to this topic would be spiritless. Western Armenian literature was a more urban phenomenon; its genesis was intrinsically linked to Constantinople and Smyrna, the provincial literature and the efforts to bring it centre-ground were either overlooked or ignored. This urban perception of literature became permanently entrenched in the Western Armenian literary tradition in the aftermath of the Genocide when outside of the homeland Armenians were scattered in big cities around the world. It was this urban experience that the writers expressed in literature, although having said that, there were scores of young writers who depicted the rural life of their homeland.

The third vital issue of the debate was on the principal role of the future Armenian literature and on the exposition of Armenian “ethnic” values. This idea first emerged during the polemics of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné*, and especially *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun*, the former initiated by Ardashes Haroutyunian and the latter by the literary periodical *Mehian*, both in Constantinople. These “ethnic” values, namely the moral and religious values as well popular culture, were the vital components in the construction of the diasporan cultural identity. Therefore, the incorporation of those values in the literary framework would enhance the “ethnic” characteristics of the literary texts, thus laying the foundations of the “national” literature.

They would be the touchstone against which Armenian literary productions would be judged. Armenian literature also had to be cleansed of the elements which were incompatible with Armenian “ethnic” values. This puritan approach towards literature was designed to create an “ethnic” space where the spiritual and intellectual edifice of the “nation” would be built. This was an example of the politics of literature, whereby the function of the literature was not only aesthetic but also political: in the absence of a serious political framework literature fills the vacuum. All these values were compacted in the idea of “Armenian soul”, which was the backbone of any production of aesthetic value.

This would lead us to the fourth point of this debate which was the feasibility of the cultivation of the ethnic literature outside the homeland. The core of this argument was based on the fact that if literature was a reflection of “racial” values, then Armenian writers had to turn their attention to the breeding ground of those values, namely rural Armenia where they were kept undistorted. Hence Armenian literature should be directed towards the source of its origin, where the decadence of the time did not spread its detrimental influence. Mkhitarian

always insisted on the exposition of “racial uniqueness” and “values” in literature, which were best preserved in the homeland within ordinary people, while Tashian rightfully reiterated his claim that the young writers had no experience of living in provincial Armenia. Only a handful of elder members of the new generation who were born in the dying years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had kept the memories of their birthplace, such as Hamasdegh.

The debate on the feasibility of the cultivation of ethnic literature in diaspora was continued beyond the boundaries of *Nor Sharzhoum*. For some critics the future of Armenian literature was inherently linked to the homeland for different reasons; this was the stance in the first half of the 1920s. Oshagan viewed the homeland, particularly the village, as the bedrock of Armenian “ethnic” values. As for Sirouni it was in vain to toil on foreign lands; cultural efforts should be concentrated in the homeland, which was the natural habitat of literature. It had all the ingredients for the cultivation of “ethnic” literature, and preservation of the Armenian identity was guaranteed. Assimilation was an inevitable danger in diaspora, therefore the construction of the “nation” would be fruitless on such shaky grounds. According to Sirouni the role of literature in diaspora was temporarily to preserve the Armenian identity until the return to the homeland. The hope of return to the homeland was lingering, accordingly the strategy of survival and preservation should be designed.

In 1928 Sirouni has changed his position with regard to the central role of the homeland in creative activities. The possible reasons for this shift are twofold. First, maybe the realisation that a great number of Armenians were living in diaspora and the repatriation to the lost homeland was for the time being an unachievable plan was a reason. Therefore, the concentration of literary activities only around the idea of homeland would amount to negligence towards the survivors. Second, the tangible homeland, namely Soviet Armenia, was not in a state that could produce the expected results in literature, due to ideological restrictions. Sirouni even went as far as admitting the dependability of the homeland on the diaspora culturally and economically. In 1928 a similar attitude was expressed by Sarafian, who also believed that the émigré communities were the permanent station of Armenians, therefore they had an important role to play.

It is also worth noting the other approaches, such as the one which Desdegyul promoted. In 1922 he was the first critic, to my knowledge, who advocated the depiction of the Armenian-American milieu as subject matter, and for the first time in the literary criticism of the diaspora was the idea of inclusion of the experience of the Armenians with the other “races” put forward. This emergent idea of depicting the life of ordinary Armenians in



diasporan communities was a significant development. It gathered momentum and culminated in the late 1920s in the fact that there was a shift from homeland to the communities.

As we see in the late 1920s the idea of the homeland as the main guarantee of the development of Armenian literature was superseded for the first time by the realisation that the diasporan communities were kind of substitute homelands where Armenians were forced to anchor. Therefore the interaction between the cultures of the local and the host societies could enrich Armenian culture in general and literature in particular.

In the mid-1920s the emergence of the new generation of Armenian diasporan writers brought to the surface a set of issues concerning their literary endeavours. The appraisal of their literary efforts by the senior generation of people of letters was based not only on aesthetic principles but also on personal disagreements and animosity. On aesthetic grounds the criticism was concentrated on the ignorance of young writers in the art of writing and use of the Armenian language. There were also some flaws in their literary practice, which were inherited from the previous generation, such as the emphasis on the form rather than the content of the literary work, the evocation of the past, and the disconnection of literature from life. There was an insufficient habit of reading the works of the older generation. Repetition of the old was another point of contention, as was the protracted or chronic immaturity symptomatic of some of writers. And finally the criticism levelled against the ARF party by Yesayan for the indoctrination of the youth with nationalist ideas.

Despite harsh criticism directed against the new generation, there was sympathetic understanding of the tragic historical situation which they endured. This show of support was led by Sirouni. In the second half of the 1920s there was a degree of optimism among writers and critics, such as Yesayan, linked to the creative future of the new generation.

The response of the new generation of writers to the accusations of the elders was initiated from the mid 1920s. The extreme disillusionment and deep pain of loss, coupled with the unsympathetic attitude shown by some old writers and critics, drove the young writers to the verge of denialism, which targeted the literary production of the previous generations. They fought for their own literary space by rejecting the authority of their elders, and they considered their patronage totally unnecessary. They equally rejected the idea of adherence to any literary project.

On this last formative phase of the Armenian literature in the diaspora the issues of the creation of a distinctly Armenian literature brought about two trends, namely the innovative

and the nationalist approaches, which marked the end of an era in 1928. The new generation, especially the Parisian wing, was acutely aware of the challenges ahead and they grasped the importance of their role in facing those challenges. They also understood the situation they were in; the dynamics of their milieu and the time. Of these, Vazken Shoushanian, Nigoghos Sarafian and Hrand Palouyian were prominent figures in their generation, who both promoted openness and emphasised the necessity of getting rid of parochialism. New criteria had to be adopted in the evaluation of the new values.

The cultural readjustment in their environment had paramount importance: it was the window for fresh air which would dissipate the nationalistic miasma of Armenian literature. Sarafian and Palouyian also promoted the idea of hybridisation of Armenian literature with other literatures, namely with European ones. This innovative approach was fuelled by the fact that in the absence of the homeland the creation of “national” literature would be a futile effort, because the writers needed the “ethnic” habitat in order to create a literature with unique Armenian colours. Therefore, the cultural background was a vital source of inspiration, which could only be provided by the homeland.

The other concern of this trend was the aesthetic renovation of the Armenian literature, which was the predominant preoccupation of the French wing of Armenian criticism in diaspora. The unfortunate circumstances threw Armenian writers and intellectuals to the four corners of the world, with a considerable number ending up in Paris. This could be transformed into a fortunate opportunity, by bringing Armenian culture near to European standards. This was far away from the ethnocentric tendencies of some critics with nationalist views. Both young critics also stressed the importance of observing life, which was the main source of nourishment for literature. Of course, that life was not the imaginary provincial one, which was shrouded by misty memories, but their actual surrounding, and their personal experience.

As for the future direction of Armenian literature, there were different approaches by the young writers. Of these, Shoushanian launched a diatribe against the Modern in the domain of life in general and art in particular, but he understood the vital role of technology as a means of bonding different nations. He was a staunch supporter of Socialism and therefore promoted Socialist-orientated literature. It needs to be stressed that his promotion of Socialist ideals was general and he did not imply their application in Armenian literature particularly. According to Sarafian in the West, Armenian literature had to be open to European cultures

by including their beneficial elements. However, the “ethnic” line in literature was a crucial guarantee for the Armenianness of the literary works.

On the other side of the argument some old critics, such as Mkhitarian, Sasouni and to a lesser extent Tashian, who were members of the ARF party, promoted the nationalist perspective. The first two were adamant in rejecting the idea that the actual homeland was essential in the creation of Armenian literature; Armenian communities with their memories of the homeland would be a sufficient source of inspiration to that end. The reason for their rejection was twofold. Firstly, if the homeland was the basis of the development of Armenian literature, then the absence of it could jeopardise the development of the diaspora literature. Secondly, from the political aspect of the argument the promotion of homeland-orientated literature could send the wrong message along diasporan communities, since it would consolidate the stature of Soviet Armenia.

As for the immediate solution for the impending dangers against the Armenian survival in diaspora Tashian suggested that the increase of nationalism would enhance the ethnic self-consciousness, something which Mkhitarian was promoting as well. Therefore nationalism, firstly, was to serve as a buffer against all alien penetrations which would distort the Armenian identity in the different domains of life. Secondly, in a time of crisis of “national” significance, embracing nationalism was a natural reaction, when the very existence of the Armenian people was at stake. It evoked images and weaved the narrative of the lost homeland, which would immunise the refugees against the dangers of assimilation, thus consolidating the footholds in the alien territory.

Criticising Tashian for inaccurate evaluation of the Armenian life of the immediate past as “anationalised”, Mkhitarian claims that there was an upsurge of nationalism due to historical events, such as the struggle for freedom and the independence of Armenia, which transformed Armenians from being a dispersed community to the state of nationhood. In the early 1920s the formation of the self-perception of diasporan Armenians as a “nation” in diaspora began to take shape in the literary criticism. The same idea was repeated by Sasouni in 1928. The nation was the highest form of organised communal life. The injection of the idea of nationhood was crucial in terms of assuming the responsibilities of a civilised and productive existence, which would contribute to the survival of the stateless Armenians in diaspora. It is worth mentioning that at the end of the 1920s the concept of “ethnic” and “racial” literature began to be superseded by the concept of “national” literature. This was due to the re-emergence and solidification of the self-perception of Armenians as a “nation”.

Evidently, in 1928 the Armenian literary criticism was at a crossroads; there were two distinct avenues for the future direction of Armenian literature. The nationalist school of thought was the echo of the “national” angst of the time, something which compelled literary criticism to push the literature on the defensive line. This approach would diminish the creative potential of the writers. On the other hand some young writers mindful of the challenges ahead rejected the idea that the promotion of nationalism was the answer to the issues of “national” significance. This would enfeeble the intellectual foundations of Armenian literature. They came up with more convincing solution, which was the experimentalist approach. They underscored the integration of Armenian culture with European cultural values; this would inject the much-needed new blood into the enervated body of Armenian literature.

The crucial point that was underlined by these critics of both trends was the importance of the domineering role of the Armenian element in the creative endeavours of the diasporan writers.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Formation of Post-Genocide Diaspora**

#### **Introduction**

This and the next two chapters draw the historical context of the post-Genocide diaspora within which literary critical discourses took place. In this chapter I will draw the cultural, political and religious map of the diaspora; I will recount the story of the formation of the Armenian post-Genocide diaspora by concentrating on its three main cultural centres, namely France, Egypt and the USA; and I will emphasise their cultural contribution to the pre- and post-Genocide diaspora, except insofar as the printed press is concerned, which will be discussed in the second chapter. Additionally, I will sketch the political landscape of the diaspora and discuss its impact on cultural life. Family, the Church and educational institutions will also be discussed in terms of their significance to the argument. Finally, I will discuss the challenges that Armenian identity faced in the post-Genocide period.

#### **The formation of Armenian communities**

For political and/or economic reasons Armenians had to migrate from their homeland, which culminated in the emergence of diasporan communities across the world. Armenians constantly moved from one settlement to another and thus the nomadic lifestyle became a quintessential trait of the Armenian character.

The final exodus was triggered by the Armenian Genocide of 1915, due to which huge numbers of Armenian survivors were scattered over a vast geographical space. In the mid-1920s, the Armenian diaspora resided in the countries of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine in the Middle East; Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and France in Europe; Ethiopia and Sudan in Africa; Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela in Latin America; and in various cities in the USA.

Armenians found themselves in socially, culturally, economically and politically diverse environments. For most of the survivors, readjustment to their new surroundings proved to be an onerous process for a variety of reasons: any grief-stricken society is prone to become introvert; a period of mourning following a crisis on such a massive scale as the Genocide could last generations; the painful assessment between the lost way of life and the one offered in the host countries made familiarisation with the new environment difficult, especially when people always hoped for return. Moreover, the refugees came to their host countries with cultural baggage, their way of living, lore, mores, customs, and cuisine, which were entrenched in the “national” character of the Armenians. On top of this there were language barriers since most of the refugees had no knowledge of the local languages. Consequently it became an established trend that refugees from the same locality would group together, thus creating ghettos within the Armenian communities. Therefore, often local identity would deter certain Armenians from mingling with other fellow Armenians, let alone mixing with non-Armenians. Another important point is that, although Armenians lived in multi-ethnic Ottoman Turkey, and interacted on a daily basis with Turks and members of other minorities in different domains (no language barrier prohibited interaction between these communities) their approach was self-protectionist. Especially when it came to relations with the Turks, Armenians considered them as the “Other”, exogamy being an example as it was deemed to be reprehensible. Therefore the experience of interaction in some degree with Turks was limited, especially on an intellectual level. In the post-Genocide diaspora this self-protectionist mentality and way of life became the norm in relations with the host societies, especially in those countries where the majority of the population was Muslim.

After their physical safety, the priority of the Armenians was to improve their living conditions. Away from persecution and racial discrimination in Turkey, Armenians displayed their innate skills and talents in various aspects of life and especially in the various economic sectors of the host countries. In safe environments they were able to show their creative skills and contributed to local economies considerably. As skilful craftsmen, tradesmen and agronomists, their vocations were represented in three sectors of the economy, although their skills did not always match the demands of the local economic workforce. Economic readjustment, especially for agronomist Armenians, was therefore necessary. In different countries Armenians encountered different work patterns, depending on the state of the economy within a given country.

At this time the world was emerging from the First World War, a war whose destructive effects had seriously harmed the growth of nations. The mass loss of human life and the maiming of millions of soldiers and civilians had crippled the economies of war-affected countries. This was coupled with the need in industrialised economies of the West for a foreign workforce. Armenian refugees responded to these opportunities, especially from France. In these countries they worked in lower sectors of the economy, enduring abominable living conditions and denigrating treatment in the workplace. After a substantial improvement in their financial situation they would initiate limited businesses. In the Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Egypt where national economies were in the process of being created, the Armenian contribution was significant. This was especially true in Lebanon and Syria, which were under French mandate, and the French for their own interests encouraged Armenians to settle in those countries, something which prompted the hostile attitude of local Arabs. Within a short period of time Armenians became integrated economically. The economic set-ups in these countries were similar to those which had existed in the Ottoman Empire, and so the economic integration of the Armenians into Middle Eastern countries proved to be easier than in other economic spheres.

### *The main diasporan cultural centres*

Along with economic welfare, Armenians had to minister to the emotional and intellectual needs of their compatriots. Social and cultural infrastructures had to be established, although in some communities that structure had already existed long before the Genocide and so many Armenians settled in these communities. In order to deal with the needs of these masses, the already existing infrastructure within host countries needed to be expanded. New schools, the printed press, cultural associations, unions of artists, churches and printing houses were all established. These organised communities attracted the intelligentsia, who congregated in these centres and helped to organise cultural, social and political activities. The main centres of diasporan cultural topography, existing between the two world wars, found themselves in diverse cultural climates in France, Egypt and the USA and in these new environments Armenian culture for the first time came into close contact with other cultural groups and was exposed to the diversity of local practices any immigrant group can expect. This interaction had its challenges, but for the most part enhanced diasporan Armenian culture.

*The French Armenian community*<sup>22</sup>

The first mention of Armenian French contact dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Gregory Tours in his “History of the Franks” tells the story of a persecuted Armenian bishop named Simeon.<sup>23</sup> Since the medieval period many Armenian communities have clustered in areas all over France, with Paris and Marseille forming the hub of their social and cultural life. French-Armenian cultural connections had a long history, and the huge impact of French liberal views on the formation of Armenian secular society and in the development of free thinking is well documented.<sup>24</sup> That influence had continued unabated until the eve of the Genocide.

After the Genocide a large number of refugees sought asylum in France. The influx to this Western country was largely prompted by the economic factors discussed above. The long-standing mutually amiable relations between the two nations were another contributing factor, which prepared the ground for the formation of a lenient attitude towards refugees. This attitude developed largely from the work of prominent French figures such as Clemenceau, Anatole France<sup>25</sup> and Jean Jaures, who showed great sympathy towards Armenians, also editing the journal “Pro Armenia” (1901-1908). Consequently only France was willing to accept refugees, and the majority of them (coming from Cilicia, Smyrna and Constantinople) settled in Paris, Marseilles and Lyon.

Armenians created the cultural institutions both to preserve and celebrate their cultural patrimony. From the mid 1920s cultural life started to gather momentum and by the 1930s Paris was already the cultural centre of the Armenian diaspora, especially with respect to the

<sup>22</sup> For the French Armenian history see *Hamabadger Arevmdahayots Meg Tarou Badmoutian, Hador IV: Hay Spyurké, Kirk I, Fransahayerou Badmoutyuné* [Panorama of One Century of the History of Western Armenians, vol. IV: The Armenian Diaspora, book I: The History of French Armenians], Levon Chormisian, Beirut, 1975. Also see “Les Arméniens et Leur Territoire”, Autrement, 1995; “Le Lien Communautaire: Trois Générations d’Arméniens”, L’Harmattan, 2007, both authored by Martine Hovanessian; “Les Arméniens En France Du Début Du XI Au Début Du XX Siècle”, Gérard Dédéyan and Raymond Kévorkian, in “Histoire Du Peuple Arménienne”, Gérard Dédéyan (edit.), Toulouse: Edition Privat, 2007 ; *Hay Spyurk Hanrakidaran* [Armenian Diaspora: Encyclopaedia], Yerevan, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Gérard Dédéyan and Raymond Kévorkian, “Les Arméniens En France....”, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> See “Enlightenment and Historical Thought”, Marc Nichanian, in “Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases”, Richard Hovannisian and David Myers (eds.), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999. The French Influence on the Western Armenian Renaissance”, James Etmekjian, New York: Twayne Publisher, Inc., 1964.

<sup>25</sup> On this subject see *Anatol Fransé Yev Hay Zhoghovourté* [Anatole France and the Armenian People], Yervant Kasbarian, Yerevan: Publication of Museum-Institute of Armenian Genocide, 2003.



printed press and literature.<sup>26</sup> During the years 1918 to 1940 an unprecedented number of newspapers, periodicals and journals were published, around 50 in Paris, 30 in Marseille and four in Lyon, covering many aspects of diasporan intellectual activity.

The exuberance of the many young and ambitious writers who settled in Paris along with their determination to preserve the Armenian identity and literary traditions brought them together around literary groups and publications. From the beginning of the 1920s a number of literary groups came into existence, some created exclusively for intellectuals, and others that were open to the public. A Union of French Armenian Writers was established by Arshag Chobanian (see Appendix) and other writers in 1923. Its aim was to help the refugee writers in France financially and in their efforts to obtain legal status in the country.<sup>27</sup> In 1933 this association was replaced by *Société des Gens de Lettre Arméniens*, which organised lectures and debates; once more the driving force was Arshag Chobanian, who became the long-serving president of this group. The writers who gathered around it published the following periodicals, *Lousaghpyur* [Source of Light] (Paris, 1952-1956, 1959, 1970-1971), *Arahed* [Path] (Paris, 1970), and *Gayk* [Place] (Paris, 1987-1993). Shavarsh Nartoumi was a central figure in the literary group of *Hartkogh*<sup>28</sup> [Straw Thief] during the years 1926-1929, again dedicated to lectures and debates. These gatherings, which were called *zhoghovertagan hamalsaran* [popular university], had multipurpose functions. First of all, they were intended to fulfil the emotional needs of the uprooted Armenians. Moreover, they were designed to educate the people in literary and cultural matters. They contributed to the formation of Armenian literati in Paris as well as serving an important social function. These gatherings were the only occasion (apart from the church service) when Armenians met their compatriots as well as their future life partners. *Hartkogh* was dissolved due to internal disputes and differences on personal and political grounds. In 1930 Misak Manoushian and Sema founded a union called *Fransahay Norakouyn Kroghnerou Engeroutyun* [Association of French Armenian Contemporary Writers]. They published the monthly *Chank* [Endeavour] (1930-1931).

Many other art forms such as painting, sculpture and theatre flourished. With the outbreak of the Second World War the vibrant diasporan community life in France came to a halt. As in the First World War, Armenians fought beside the French resistance. For example the

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive account of French Armenian literature see Krikor Beledian, "Cinquante Ans....".

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> The name of the association is derived from the pagan Armenian legend of Vahagn.

French-Armenian writer Misak Manoushian and, a fighter in the Armenian brigade, was executed by a Nazi firing squad in Paris in 1944.

### *Armenian communities in the USA*

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century very few Armenians migrated to America, although the Armenian presence there dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that they became interested in this distant country, thanks to American missionaries who made their way into Armenia to convert the population to Protestantism in the 1800s. They opened schools, established health care centres and promoted printing materials of a religious nature and many young Armenians were sent to America to further their education with their support. After the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896) and the Genocide, thousands of refugees poured into America. They were concentrated in New York, Providence, Worcester, Boston, Fresno and Los Angeles and by the mid 1920s there were 100,000 Armenians in America.

America was a vast country and this fact naturally conditioned the state of communal life of the American Armenians. Unlike the Armenian communities in Paris and Beirut, this decentralised state of communal life of American Armenians affected cultural productivity. In its wide dispersion, Armenian communal life has been centred around the Church, as with the prevailing cultural tradition in America. However, Armenian political parties and cultural associations had existed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Egyptian Armenian communities*

With its high educational standing in the Christian world, the desire for education had brought many young Armenian students to Alexandria from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>30</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> century many Armenians migrated to Egypt due to the tolerant treatment by the

<sup>29</sup> On the history of Armenians in the USA see Robert Mirak's "Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I", Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983. From the same author also see "The Armenians in America", in "The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Foreign Domination to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century", Richard Hovannisian (edit.), vol. II, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> On the history of the Egyptian Armenian diaspora see the following sources: *Arapagan Miatsial Hanrabedoutian Yekibdosi Nahanké Yev Hayeré* [The State of Egypt in the United Arab Republic and Armenians], Arshag Alboyajian, Cairo, 1960; *Yekibdosi Haygagan Kaghouti Badmoutyun* [A History of the Armenian Colony of Egypt], Hovh. Kh. Topouzian, Yerevan, 1978; "Armenians in Egypt: Contribution of Armenians to Medieval and Modern Egypt", Sona Zeitlian, Los Angeles, 2006.

Fatimides towards Christians.<sup>31</sup> During the same period, high-ranking Armenian generals, who were converted to Islam, held important military positions in the Arab armies.

Armenians in Egypt were a privileged minority, and this was the opportunity for it to become a prosperous community. The Armenian contribution to the Egyptian economy and politics was significant. The first bank in Egypt was established in 1837 by Armenians. Noubar Pasha, a prominent Armenian political figure and philanthropist, served in the Egyptian government as foreign minister (1866-1888) and intermittently as prime minister (1878-1879, 1884-1889, 1894-1895). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was an organised communal life in Cairo. The first Armenian school was established in 1828; by 1917 the number of Armenian schools had risen to eleven, rising to almost double this figure by 1935. The first Armenian journal was *Armaveni* [Palm Tree] (1865, Cairo), but the pivotal publication was *Housaper* [Hope Deliverer] (1913-present, Cairo), which became the beacon for the promotion of Armenian values and the forging of Armenian identity in the Middle East and the diaspora. The literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoun* [New Movement] (1923-1924, Cairo) had a significant role in foregrounding the outstanding issues of the future literature of the diaspora, thus contributing to its shaping. Two names are intrinsically linked to both publications, those of Kourken Mkhitarian (see Appendix) and Peniamin Tashian (see Appendix), both literary critics in their own right and central figures of the literary critical productions in these publications from the 1920s onwards. Another important publication was *Arev* [Sun] (1915-1924, Alexandria; 1924-present, Cairo), which covered a wide range of issues of literary importance. One of its editors was Vahan Tekeyian (see Appendix), a renowned poet of the Constantinople generation.

It would be unjust not to mention the foundation of *Haygagan Parekordzagan Enthanour Mioutyun* [Armenian General Benevolent Union, henceforth AGBU] by the philanthropist Noubar Pasha in Cairo, 1906. After the Genocide AGBU was at the forefront in the efforts to reconstruct the shattered Armenian way of life in communities all around the world and in Soviet Armenia, be that financially or morally.

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<sup>31</sup> See "The Fatimid Armenians. Cultural & Political Interaction in the Near East", Seta B. Dadoyan, Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997.

## Diasporan Institutions

### The political parties

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Armenian political parties came into being. In 1887 *Sotsial Temograd Hinchagian Gousagtsoutyun* [Social Democratic Hinchagian Party, henceforth SDHP] was founded in Geneva. The second, *Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagtsoutyun* [Armenian Revolutionary Federation, henceforth ARF] was founded in Tiflis in 1890.<sup>32</sup> The objectives of these parties were to stir the national consciousness of Armenians and to raise political awareness in Ottoman Turkey. They disseminated revolutionary ideas and organised guerrilla warfare in order to give a moral boost to politically benumbed Armenians. The ARF was more influential than the SDHP, and was the ruling party during the first short-lived independent Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), when they conceded their power to the Bolsheviks. After the Sovietisation of Armenia, the ARF was forced into exile in diaspora. The ARF and SDHP had had political cells previously existing in America, Europe and the Middle East. In 1921 the third Armenian party was founded in Constantinople, namely *Ramgavar Azadagan Gousagtsoutyun* [Liberal Democratic Party, henceforth LDP]. Soviet Armenia had its share of staunch supporters in the communities as well, and especially in the representation of Communist Armenians, who formed their own political space in order to prop up the stature of Soviet Armenia. But this support fell far short of forming a strong political representation in terms of grassroots structure and organisation, and it was confined to only a few communities.

Although in diaspora SDHP, ARF and LDP shared the same objective in terms of organising diasporan communal life, they never managed to coordinate their efforts for two reasons. Firstly, in the newly formed diasporan communities there was much fertile ground for political activity and vast political space to be filled. Parties vied for political zones of influence. ARF used all means to spread its influence in every diasporan community, in all its social, political, and cultural aspects and owing to its organisational potential, ARF had the lion's share in this political race. This approach predictably put ARF on a collision course with the other political parties, and on the political scene this created serious disagreements

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<sup>32</sup> On this subject see "The Armenian Revolutionary Movement", Louise Nalbandian, University of California Press, 1967; "History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation: Dashnaktsutun, 1890-1924", Hratch Dasnabedian, Milan, 1989; "Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887-1912)", Anahide Ter Minasian, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zoryan Institute, 1984.

and rivalry. This was most prominently led by the LDP, the main challenger to the ARF hegemony. Disputes were rife within the communities.

Secondly, the positioning of the Armenian political parties in relation to Soviet Armenia put additional strains on cross-party relations. After the collapse of the independent Armenian republic, the exiled ARF became a fierce opponent and critic of the new Communist regime and in response a coalition of anti-ARF forces was formed. This was composed of the SDHP, LDP and the Armenian Communists, which were backed, if not financially at least politically, by Soviet Armenia. This was purely politically motivated strife. As a matter of fact, in ideological terms, ARF was a socialist party, supposedly in the same ideological camp as the SDHP, but also in an ideologically acceptable position with regard to the Soviet regime as well. The importance of the role of ideology in Armenian political culture was insignificant. Incongruously, the LDP, which advocated capitalist-liberal ideas, thus infringing the very premises of the Communist ideology, had become an ally of Soviet Armenia in the diaspora. However, it needs to be mentioned that the relations between LDP and the Soviet Armenian regime were turbulent during the totalitarian reign of Stalin.

For the pro-Soviet Armenian camp, the Armenian SSR was a success story. It was the only and last living remnant of a historical motherland which now, under the physical protection of the Soviet Union, was growing both economically and culturally. A source of inspiration and pride, it fell, by contrast with the territories occupied by Turkey, and in turn a source of much pain. The small stretch of land known as the Armenian SSR was the only guarantee for the survival of Armenians. It became the prosperous face of the homeland – a moral boost which was desperately needed by refugee Armenians in exile. Zabel Yesayian (see Appendix), a partisan supporter of Soviet Armenian authority, aired her opinion on this matter. Consonant with the given mindset, she asserted that Soviet Armenia had become the *raison d'être* of the refugees; now “their whole life would have a meaning and aim”.<sup>33</sup> This revival was widely reflected in the pro-Soviet Armenian printed press. Every cultural, economic and sporting success of the Armenian SSR was hailed as a great achievement and source of pride. Even insignificant successes were over-inflated in order to maximise the political impact.

In contrast, the ARF regarded the Soviet Armenian regime as a source of evil, an administration that was denying the basic rights of human freedom. Of course, the

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<sup>33</sup> See *Tebi Mer Yergiré* [Towards Our Country], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 143, 10<sup>th</sup> October, Paris, 1926.

authoritarian Soviet regime gave good reason for the justification of this political posture.<sup>34</sup> The Armenian SSR as a geographical entity was a small part of their wider territorial imagination of *miatsial angakh Hayasdan* [united and independent Armenia]. Geographically, it encompassed the territories which stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, better known as *dzové dzov Hayasdan* [from sea to sea Armenia]. This entailed the notion of Return to *hayrenik* [fatherland] and accentuated the idea of the temporariness of the present *kaghtagan* [refugee/émigré] state. This notion was ingrained in the collective imagination of the grassroots of the party, and for some it still did not lose its charm. This idea was reflected at every possible occasion and there are many typical examples, one being an obituary<sup>35</sup> on the passing of a doctor Kegham Tatarian, a person with social standing and a member of ARF. The obituary was printed through the official organ of ARF, the Cairo based *Housaper* in 1929. After the lamentation of this loss of young life, the writer concludes with a promise that when the time comes (the writer rather poignantly expresses the coming of the new time metaphorically as “sunrise”) his remains will be laid to rest “in the heart” of his “worshiped Armenia”.<sup>36</sup> Now, here there is some confusion over which Armenia the writer refers to: the Armenia which would to be freed from Soviet despotic rule or the one under Turkish occupation and waiting to be liberated. The answer lies in another promise delivered 77 years later in a commemoration event in Beirut 2006 dedicated to the ARF “martyrs”<sup>37</sup> of the Lebanese civil war, who had given their lives in the defence of the Lebanese Armenian community. The keynote speaker<sup>38</sup> promises the deceased that when the time comes their remains will be laid to rest “within the boundaries of the *complete* [my italics] fatherland”.<sup>39</sup> It is very important to emphasise the word “complete”, by which the speaker referred to homeland that comprises all the territories of historical Armenia. In nationalist rhetoric the unification of the Armenian territories has not been completed. Even the collapse of the Soviet system in Armenia and the eventual emergence of the independent

<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that the ARF itself failed to create the democratic mechanism necessary to administer the affairs of state of the Armenian diaspora.

<sup>35</sup> See *Pzhishg Kegham Tatarian* [Doctor Kegham Tatarian], Alik, *Housaper*, no. 46, 25<sup>th</sup> May, Cairo, 1929.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See *Kaghouté Kaghout* [From Community to Community], *Harach* [Forward], no. 21,499, 19<sup>th</sup> July, Paris, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Most probably the speaker Hrach Varzhabedian is representative of the second or third generation in the diaspora. It must be noted that neither the writers of the obituary (Alik) nor Hrach Varzhabedian were members of the political elite of the ARF party; however, their views were and are shared by many followers, including the elite. For example in the case of Hrach Varzhabedian, he is one of the regular columnist of the Beirut-based ARF party organ *Aztag* [Factor], and often he utters similar views.

<sup>39</sup> *Kaghouté Kaghout*, loc. cit.

Republic of Armenia as a sovereign state in 1991 did not diminish the ARF's hopes of retrieving the homeland as a whole – there is always the lost part of the homeland to be retrieved in order to become “complete”.

The propaganda machine of the ARF put much effort into evoking the image of the lost homeland, in turn becoming itself a political asset. It was used to divert the “national” aspiration of homeland from Soviet Armenia to remote and unreachable mythical lands in order to break the growing spiritual link between the refugee Armenians and the Soviet Armenian homeland.

It is worth bringing into our discussion an article<sup>40</sup> called *Daron* written by Shavarsh Misakian (see Appendix), one of the elite members of the Paris circles. It evokes in a nostalgic mood the religious festival of *Vartavar* [literally: “festooned with roses”] in the homeland, which is deeply rooted in pagan culture; its Christian substitution is *Aylagerboutyun* [Transfiguration], which is one of the five most important festivals in the Armenian religious calendar. It is dedicated to the transfiguration of Jesus in front of his three disciples. During this festival, pilgrimages would be organised and a whole popular culture was woven around it. He specifically recollects the *Vartavar* of 28 June 1915, when the very same day the deportations and a massacre were triggered in the province of Daron. Misakian continues with an assertive tone that “the physical world collapsed, but the spirit lives”.<sup>41</sup> This spiritual dimension of the homeland is very common in the nationalistic rhetoric of ARF. It is their way to say that, yes, we lost the country, but we have the memory and we are under its magic spell, and that itself facilitates survival. Misakian concludes with an optimistic note that the “morning will not be late”.<sup>42</sup> Here it is helpful to note a resemblance with the notion of “sunrise” in the above-mentioned obituary (*Pzhishg Kegham Tatarian*). The metaphor of the coming of light designates a hope for a future which will bring all together under the same sky of the homeland; a sky where all can lay their deceased ones to rest and celebrate their festivals. The same narrative is ubiquitous in the territorial imagination of other narrators of the same ideology. Together they weave the myth of a country which can only be retrieved by the intervention of intellectual endeavour and struggle.

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<sup>40</sup> The original article was printed 12 July 1931 and it is noteworthy that it was reprinted in *Harach*, no. 21,502; 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> July, Paris, 2006. It is most likely the article was originally printed in the same newspaper, though there is no reference.

<sup>41</sup> Shavarsh Misakian, *Daron*, loc. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Zabel Yesayian calls this kind of homeland “fictitious”<sup>43</sup> as opposed to the real one (of Soviet Armenia) and blames her opponents in herding the Armenian youth towards the “unachieved dreams of the past”.<sup>44</sup> These unfulfilled, anachronistic dreams and dubious imaginings leave the refugees on shaky ground and serve only to make them vulnerable, while the principal guarantee for the sustainability of Armenian identity is Soviet Armenia.<sup>45</sup>

The approach of the Soviet Armenian authorities towards the Armenian diaspora was extremely cautious,<sup>46</sup> in keeping with the paranoid Soviet attitude towards the rest of the world. This stance defined Soviet policy during the 1920s and 1930s. This said, Soviet Armenia did nonetheless forge relations with the “trusted” segments of the diaspora. This was for two reasons: first to solicit much needed financial aid for the Soviet Armenian economy and second to diffuse its political influence in the diaspora. In 1921, Soviet Armenia founded the fundraising organisation for the reconstruction of the Soviet Armenian economy, *Hayasdani Oknoutian Gomidé* (HOG) [Aid Committee for Armenia] which had numerous branches in Armenian communities across the world. This became the mouthpiece for the Soviet Armenian government and an instrument to exert political influence. AGBU had its share of financial contributions in the Soviet Armenian economy as well. Of course, these efforts were supported by the anti-ARF alliance of the LDP, SDHP and the Armenian Communists. These political relations were severed, first with the AGBU on ideological grounds, and subsequently HOG was dissolved by the Soviet Armenian government in 1937. In general, relations at this time with the diaspora were ceased as a result of the wave of the persecutions which struck the Soviet Union. It was in the second half of the 1950s that the Soviet Union, and therefore, as a consequence also Soviet Armenia partly came out of self-imposed isolation, to become much more involved in the life of the diaspora. This can in part be attributed to her desire to gain more political influence in the Armenian communities in dispersion. Uncompromising attitudes and from time to time the strife between Soviet Armenia and the ARF showed no sign of abating, and a rapprochement was never achieved during the first decades of the dispersion.

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<sup>43</sup> See *Kragan Paghtsankner* [Literary Wishes], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 33, 24<sup>th</sup> January, Paris, 1926.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> It is significant that both of the homelands, for political reasons, were beyond the reach of the refugees during the first decade or so of the dispersion. However, the hope of return for both groups was intense.

<sup>46</sup> On this subject see “Armenians : From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars”, Razmig Panossian, pp. 262-318, London : Hurst & Company, 2006; “Colporteurs du Komintern”, Taline Ter Minasian, Press de la Fondation Nationale des Science Politique, 1997.



The crucial moment in diaspora-Soviet Armenian relations was the mass migration of diasporan Armenians to the homeland. From the mid-1930s to the end of the 1940s there were a number of repatriation schemes to Soviet Armenia. Around 150,000 Armenians, mainly from the Balkans, Middle East and to a lesser extent Europe, heeded the calls of repatriation called *nerkaght* [immigration] in order to boost the number of the population and the war-ravaged economy of Soviet Armenia.<sup>47</sup>

Political rivalries between the parties ideologically intersected Armenian communities across the world, and culminated in the creation of adverse political, cultural and social orbits. In this way division became part of Armenian identity. At least until the end of the 1920s, poverty-stricken refugees showed a general apathy towards politics, and this was for two reasons. First of all, under Ottoman rule, Armenians were recognised by their religious creed and represented by the Armenian Church and hence were accustomed to regard the Church as a credible representative of the nation. The second stemmed from a fear of involvement in political activities within the Ottoman Empire, where political parties had always been regarded by conservative Armenians as a source of instability and harm. It was only in the mid 1930s that political parties had penetrated diasporan communities after the strenuous efforts to establish educational, cultural and party infrastructure and political machinery.

The defining moment in Armenia-diaspora relations, as far as the literature was concerned, was the adoption of the new orthography in Soviet Armenia in 1922, devised by Manoug Apeghian. This change was interpreted within the diaspora as a purely politically motivated move in order to create a deep cultural cleavage between two sections of the Armenian people. The Soviets did not cave in to the mounting dissatisfaction in the diaspora<sup>48</sup> and many intellectuals from different political persuasions voiced their concern over the issue. In an editorial<sup>49</sup> in the periodical *Navasart* the new orthography was labelled as “labyrinth”, which had no purpose but “to widen the gap between Armenia and

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<sup>47</sup> On this subject see “The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History Vol. II, 1941-2006”, Raymond H. Kévorkian and Vahé Tachjian, translated by G. M. Goshgarian, pp. 291-309, Cairo, Paris, New York, 2006; Razmig Panossian, “The Armenians:.....”, op. cit., pp. 358-376.

<sup>48</sup> To the present day this issue is highly controversial and is one of the elements which define the relations between Armenia and the diaspora.

<sup>49</sup> See *Payts Voch Anishkhanoutiamp* [But not by Anarchy], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 11, May, Bucharest, 1926, p. 297.

Armenians abroad’’.<sup>50</sup> Arshag Chobanian calls it “deformed orthography”<sup>51</sup> and sees it as a hindrance to the linking of literatures on both sides.

## **The cultural affiliates of the political parties**

### ***Cultural organisations***

The political parties brought into existence affiliated organisations, covering a wide range of the cultural and social aspects of life in the diaspora. Schools, printing houses and press, social welfare, health care, athletic organisations, scout movements and cultural organisations were founded in order to create favourable conditions in which Armenian life in diaspora would thrive. But there was a far more important reason behind the motivation of this endeavour that urged the political parties to establish such a network. It was necessary to keep their followers first within “ethnic” boundaries and second within their zone of ideological influence by providing the refugees and their descendants with the kinds of cultural and social services that they needed.

Cultural life in the diaspora was organised by associations affiliated to political parties. Two renowned intellectuals, Levon Shant (see Appendix) and Nigol Aghpalian,<sup>52</sup> with the collaboration of Kaspar Ipekian<sup>53</sup> and other fellow activists, founded *Hamazkayin Mshagoutayin Mioutyun* [Pan-Armenian Cultural Association] in 1928 in Cairo (this was an affiliate of ARF). This group pursued a wide range of cultural activities, such as theatrical, musical and dance performances. They also promoted literature through the publishing of literary journals. The other two cultural associations were *Tekeyian Mshagoutayin Mioutyun* [Tekeyian Cultural Association] (founded in Beirut in 1947, which was an affiliate of the LDP), and *Nor Serount Mshagoutayin Mioutyun* [New Generation Cultural Association] (founded in Beirut in 1955 and an affiliate of the SDHP). These organisations promoted Armenian culture and art in order to maintain the Armenian cultural identity in diaspora.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Chobanian’s treatise was published in Paris in 1926 as a three-part series of articles in the biweekly *Arakadz* (see *Mer Kraganoutyuné* [Our Literature], Arshag Chobanian, no. 1-2, 1<sup>st</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> January; no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> February; no. 4, 15<sup>th</sup> February). It was also published as a booklet with the same title in Paris in 1926 by the publishing house of Hovhannes Boghosian (1889-1972). In this thesis all citations will refer to the booklet, see p.12.

<sup>52</sup> Nigol Aghpalian (1875-1947) was a literary critic, educator and cultural activist.

<sup>53</sup> Kaspar Ipekian (1883-1952) was a theatrical director, actor and literary critic.

### The impact of political intolerance upon culture

One can easily conclude that literature and art could not be exempt from this political strife; that it would suffocate the much-needed creative drive of the new breed of people of letters, and would affect the creative productivity and intellectual activity of most artists and writers. The production of artworks and literary texts would bear the symptoms of a stagnated intellectual environment.

One of the editorials of the Cairo-based newspaper *Arev* touches upon this subject. It was dedicated to the New York-based American theatrical director of Armenian descent, Roupén Mamoulian (see Appendix). The editorial mentions with pride his success as a rising star in the American theatre of the mid 1920s, and names a host of acclaimed critics who were generous towards Roupén in their praise. The columnist<sup>54</sup> concludes that had Mamoulian stayed in the Armenian environment, he would not have enjoyed the artistic achievements and successes he did because the Armenian environment was not conducive to the production of an artist of his calibre. That is the reason why Armenian artists remain “mediocre” or “of sub-mediocre calibre”.<sup>55</sup> The writer does not spell out the reasons why the production of home-grown talents should be unfeasible, but it is not difficult to discern, in this context of political intolerance, the obstacles in promoting any kind of aesthetic liberalism. When parochialism and narrow-mindedness become the norm within a culture, any creative or intellectual burgeoning should hardly be expected. Certainly these were not the reconstructive components which would build the Armenian diasporan cultural identity.

The exposition of this kind of intolerant attitude in the post-Genocide dispersion was brought and/or inherited mainly from the Armenian political culture of the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of pre-Genocide Constantinople, where the same kind of divisive political developments had taken place. We can find an emblematic account in the editorial<sup>56</sup> of the *Navasart* literary periodical. The writer,<sup>57</sup> Hagop Sirouni (see Appendix), one of the intellectuals of this time closely involved in literary and political activities within Constantinople, gives an account of the political and cultural strife of the

<sup>54</sup> In all likelihood the columnist was Vahan Tekeyian, the editor at the time.

<sup>55</sup> See *Arvesd Yev Kraganoutyun* [Art and Literature], editorial, *Arev*, no. 2766, 15<sup>th</sup> March, Cairo, 1928.

<sup>56</sup> *Arvesdê Amen Panê Arach*, editorial, *Navasart*, no. 6, March-April, vol. 1, Bucharest, 1924, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> I ascribe this text to Hagop Sirouni based on the fact that he was the sole editor of the periodical. The credibility of witness accounts and the style of the text leave no doubt about this. In this thesis all the editorials of *Navasart* (Bucharest) are ascribed to him.

time and its impact on the literary milieu. Sirouni reflects on past events and states that one of the negative by-products of the revolutionary activities and struggle-to-arms (referring here to the conflict in the Armenian provinces led by the SDHP and ARF) was political bickering between the parties and the inclusion of the men of letters within them.

Sirouni remembers the extent of the animosity between these groups in Constantinople, “[of whom] quite a few would not greet each other”,<sup>58</sup> and he asserts that there were two futile attempts to bring the writers together. In the first decade or so of the post-Genocide Armenian dispersion the mindset of the Armenian political elite had already been shaped so that even in new calamitous situations, such as post-Genocide uncertainty and forced exile, they were unable to rise above personal and ideological differences. In diaspora, the uniform pattern of behaviour was repeated by the old guard of intellectuals. The old antagonism took new shape and colour, and was charged with new political content. There was a lack of any profound intellectual argumentative spirit, their rhetoric was marred by unconstructive fervour and the trading of insults was rife. Often the scholarly norms of propriety were disregarded. In an editorial, Hagop Sirouni makes acute remarks on Zabel Yesayan’s unconventional way of conducting debate and of responding to issues with regard to the welfare of Armenian writers, which were raised by her political rival, namely Avedis Aharonian (see Appendix), who complains that Yesayan personalises the issue.<sup>59</sup> This kind of detracting expression was uttered, ironically, by one of the most respected men of letters, Arshag Chobanian, who by discourteous wordplay renders the name of Oshagan as *ishagan* [donkeyish].<sup>60</sup>

As we can see, the sectarian mentality was pervasive in every cultural domain of the diaspora and literature and literary criticism were no exception. The literary press and other publications that were funded by political parties bear the hallmark of their ideologies with regard to choice of subjects, writers and contributors. Each camp promoted its own literary output and its circle of “trusted” writers who, instead of pursuing their literary mission for the dissemination of beauty and human values, were at the forefront of ideological battles. Some fought with conviction, while for others enticed by the rewards of acting as a political mouthpiece, it was a matter of convenience.

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<sup>58</sup> Hagop Sirouni, *Arvesdé Amen Pané Arach*, p. 162, loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup> See *Hay Harousdn ou Hay Kroghé* [The Armenian Rich Man and the Armenian Writer], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 4, July-August, p. 97, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>60</sup> See Arshag Chobanian, *Mer Kraganoutyuné*, op. cit., p. 29.

The poor economic circumstances surrounding the Armenian people of letters in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were well documented. This financial need exposed their vulnerability and forced them to take shelter under the wing of one or another of the parties. Political affiliation brought comparative financial stability in the form of employment on any given level within the structure of a political party. It also brought manifold benefits, including the enhancement of social standing within a community and the dispensation of a much-needed platform to reach out to wider segments of society and thus widen circles of readership. It was a complete package of assistance in return for unquestionable loyalty and party discipline. Writers who would not capitulate ideologically under any circumstances had to rely entirely on the strength of their talents, seeking positions which would not compromise their integrity. As in the case of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century<sup>61</sup> Constantinople, this kind of practice and mindset naturally erected barriers between intellectuals of different persuasions and impeded the necessary intellectual, and consequently ideological, collaboration.

Once more, one of the most divisive and controversial issues was the evaluation of Soviet Armenian literature. This prompted two different approaches generally but not always based on ideological premises. The literary critical circles of the pro-Soviet Armenian camp often unquestionably hailed almost every piece of literary text that was produced in Soviet Armenia. Conversely, in the ARF press, literary critics had decried the literature of Soviet Armenia, a literature which was directed by the Communist ideological machinery. These critics promoted writers who were the victims of Stalin's purges and repression. I employ the word "generally" above, because in the pro-Soviet camp there was silent unease with regards to the level of ideological interference by the Communist authorities in the literary production of Soviet Armenia. Such a case was Arshag Chobanian's timid attempt to break that silence. Chobanian was a member of the LDP, and had therefore close links with the authorities in Armenia. In a treatise dedicated to the current state of Armenian literature in dispersion and Soviet Armenia<sup>62</sup> Chobanian faces the dilemma of promoting Armenian literary values at the risk of rousing the suspicion of the Communists in Armenia towards his allegiance. He chooses to play the dual role of both critic and diplomat, preferring to regard Soviet Armenia as a "semi-independent"<sup>63</sup> state, where ideological freedom, an important

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<sup>61</sup> *Arvedé Amen Pané Arach*, loc. cit. p. 161-163.

<sup>62</sup> Arshag Chobanian, *Mer Kragamoutyuné*, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

requisite for any intellectual growth, “does still not exist”.<sup>64</sup> Later, in the same page, Chobanian contradicts himself by dubbing the premises of Communist ideology as “broad-minded principles”.<sup>65</sup> There are two incompatible concepts that Chobanian flimsily tries to reconcile and this ambiguous stance prompts the reaction of Zabel Yesayan, who makes apposite remarks about the existing inconsistencies within Chobanian’s arguments. However, she too fails to demonstrate an unbiased approach.<sup>66</sup>

The politicised evaluation of literature was common practice in the culture of diasporan literary criticism and in this context it sometimes proved to be an effective tool to serve political ends. Conversely, the principles of evaluating the literary text from an aesthetic point of view were at times ignored.

### *Family*

Family has been regarded by Armenians as the most important institution in the forging and maintaining of Armenian “ethnic” identity. That function in Armenian society had been disrupted by the Genocide. Every single family was affected by the tragedy, which had dispersed them across a wide geographical space; in many cases members of the same family found themselves on different continents. Huge numbers of children were either orphaned or abducted by Turks, Kurds and Arabs, and were forcibly converted to Islam.

If the Armenian family was the most important institution in the preservation of “ethnic” values, then reconstruction of that institution would contribute to the efforts of survival and laying the foundation of the “nation”.<sup>67</sup> With the help of foreign organisations such as Near East Relief (American), the Lord Mayor’s Fund and Save The Children (both English), Swiss and French missionary groups, and Armenian organisations, such as AGBU, *Vorpakhnam* [Orphan Welfare] and *Hay Azkayin Mioutyun* [Armenian National Association], the task of saving the orphans started in earnest even before the Armistice in 1918. Tens of thousands of

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> See Zabel Yesayan *Kragan Paghtsankner*, loc. cit.

<sup>67</sup> The subject of the reorganisation of the Armenian family in the post-Genocide period mostly remains one of the unexplored fields of Armenian studies. On this matter the recently published first volume on the history of AGBU could be useful, where in the context of the relief efforts of the Genocide victims the reorganisation of Armenian family life is discussed. See “The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History Vol. I: 1906-1940”, Raymond H. Kévorkian and Vahé Tachjian, translated by G. H. Goshgarian, Cairo, Paris and New York, 2006: Also see “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide”, Vahé Tachjian, “Nations and Nationalism”, no. 15 (1), pp. 60-80, London, 2009.

orphans were retrieved and housed in purpose-built orphanages in Lebanon (Sidon, Tyre, Byblos and Antelias), Syria (Damascus and Aleppo), Egypt (Alexandria and Cairo), Greece and Bulgaria.

Armenians found themselves in the culturally diverse environments of the host societies, which could be divided into two different cultural zones: one being the countries which had previously been under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from North Africa to the Balkans and the other being the Western zone, namely Europe and North America. Armenians showed different behavioural patterns in these diverse cultural environments. The Armenian family system was patriarchal and traditionalist and these traits dominated every aspect of Armenian diasporan life. As mentioned above, the Armenian family has been regarded as the bastion in the preservation of “ethnic” values. Such a mindset put Armenians on a collision course with local cultures, which was palpably reflected in the communities of the Christian West, where the Western way of life and their values were regarded as incompatible with Armenian values, and therefore dangerous to the preservation of the integrity of the Armenian family for although they shared the same religious faith, the gap between the two cultures was wide. In the Eastern societies, where the Ottoman social system was still viable, it proved to be easier for Armenians to readjust because family and social values were uniform. Having said that, the religious factor in the East, namely Islam, itself became a natural barrier between the two cultures. Armenians interacted within their “ethnic” group and they enjoined the next generation to do the same. Exogamy was reprimanded and the “offenders” would be treated as pariahs. Thus Armenian cultural ghettos were created. These formed “ethnic” spaces where Armenian values would be preserved in exile. It is an empirical fact that the process of assimilation in the Christian West was faster than in the Islamic East.

### *Church*

It is known that since its establishment in 301<sup>68</sup> the Armenian Apostolic Church has been the most important and influential institution in Armenian life within the homeland and in the

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<sup>68</sup> The dating of the establishment of the Armenian Church proved to be contentious. Scholars came up with different dates. Of these, there is a school of thought which links its establishment to the consecration of St Gregory in Caesarea of Cappadocia in 314. On these debates, see: “La Data e le Circonstanze Della Consecrazione di S. Gregorio Illuminatore”, Paolo Ananian, “Le Muséon”, 74, 1961 ; “The Arshagouni Dynasty”, Nina G. Garsoïan, in “The Armenian People from Ancient Times, vol. I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century”, Richard Hovannisian (edit.), New York: St Martin’s Press, 1977; “Agathangelos. History of the Armenians”, Robert W. Thompson, Albany: State University of New York,

diaspora. Its impact in forging the Christian identity of Armenians was enormous, and this became an inherent part of Armenian culture.<sup>69</sup> This was prompted by two historical facts. First, the invasions and persecutions by non-Christian armies in the name of their religion only fortified the resolve of Armenians to adhere to their Christian faith. This not only accentuated the importance of the Church as defender of the faith, but also formed the self-perception of Armenians as “unique” by faith in the midst of non-Christians. Second, the power vacuum created by the fall of the last Armenian kingdom in the homeland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and in Cilicia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was filled by the Church, which assumed the political and administrative obligations to organise the Armenians’ state of affairs. This monopoly lasted 600 years, consolidating the importance of the social role of the Church, leading to recognition by foreign rulers as such, as in the case of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The Church has been regarded as the guardian of the spiritual, intellectual and cultural values of the Armenian people. As such the role of the clergy in defending those values is well documented. The emergence of Armenian liberalism in urban centres from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century challenged the perception of that role. In this connection the controversy surrounding the introduction of the Armenian vernacular is of particular importance. There were two vernaculars [*ashkharhapar*]: Eastern Armenian (developed in Tiflis) and Western Armenian (developed in Constantinople), which became the dominant means of oral and written communication. Classical Armenian, however, remained the language of the Church and, to some extent, the official written language.

As far as Western Armenian was concerned, the issue of the introduction of the vernacular was a source of polemic as early as the 1840s in Constantinople and Smyrna in the form of *krabaykar* [struggle of language].<sup>70</sup> The champions of classical Armenian, such as Father

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1976; ‘Il Primo Secolo dell’ Armenia Cristina (298-387): Della Letteratura Alla Storia’, Jean Pierre Mahé, pp. 64-72, in ‘Roma-Armenia’, Claude Moutafian (edit.), Rome, 1999.

<sup>69</sup> The sources on the subject of the contribution of the Church to the formation of Armenian identity during history in general and in the post-Genocide period in particular are sparse. Of these, the following sources are recommended for consultation: ‘Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian’, Anny Bakalian, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1993. Especially, see chapter two, ‘Church and Politics’, pp. 89-178; ‘The Role of the Armenian Church in the Diaspora’, Khachig Tölölyan, ‘Armenian Review’ vol. 41, no. 1 (161), pp. 56-68, Spring, Boston, 1988.

<sup>70</sup> For further information one can consult the following sources: *Hay Nor Kraganoutian Badmoutyun* [History of Modern Armenian Literature], vol. I, Yerevan: Publication of the Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1962, pp. 65-72; *Bolis Yev Ir Teré* [Constantinople and its Role], Hagop Sirouni, vol. II, Beirut, 1969, pp. 93-103; *Kragan Arevmdahayereni Gazmavoroumé* [The Formation of the Western Armenian Literary Language], A. Ajemian, Yerevan, 1971; *Zhamanagagits Hayereni Hamarod Badmoutyun* [A Brief History of the Contemporary Armenian Language], Kourken Sevag, Yerevan, 1948; ‘From Humanism to Rationalism: Armenian Scholarship in the Nineteenth Century’, Rouben Paul Adalian, Atalanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992.



Madatia Karakash, Hagop Kourken, Reteos Berberian, and other conservative elements were backed by the Armenian clergy. The nostalgic attachment to the past glory of classical Armenian pushed the conservative camp to promote the language of the ancestors as the only viable means to connect to the cultural heritage of the past; unlike the “vulgar” vernacular, classical Armenian was a graceful vehicle of literary accomplishment. For them the vernacular was just another dialect, an agent of division, whereas the classical language was a unifying factor of the nation.

The supporters of the vernacular were Paris-educated liberals such as Krikor Odian, Nahabed Rousinian, Sdepan Vosgan, Garabed Utujian, and others. For them, the promotion of the vernacular was an important means of being in direct contact with the population to disseminate their liberal ideas, thus prompting vital changes in the social, political and cultural spheres.

The final blow to classical Armenian came from the Armenian Realist literary movement, which emerged in the 1880s in Constantinople. The Realist aesthetic tenet of depicting real life without any distortion was consonant with the principles of the proponents of the vernacular. Real-life characters needed an apposite language to convey the authenticity of reality, and the vernacular served that end. The Realist feature of descriptive form purified the vernacular to become a fully-fledged literary language. By the mid 1880s the victory of the Western Armenian language was final.

The adoption of the vernacular had great significance in terms of fortifying the bases of the cultural identity of Armenians. It was a factor of unification for Armenians across class and creed – the language was accessible to every member of the community. Moreover it enhanced the communal sense of belonging of the ordinary Armenians, thus contributing to the construction of communal identity.

In addition to the Patriarchate of Constantinople the other three hierarchical Holy Sees were the Catholicosate of Echmiadzin, the supreme authority in the Armenian Church (in Russian Armenia, then in Armenian SSR), the patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Catholicosate of Cilicia (in Sis, then Aleppo 1915-1929; Antelias (north of Beirut) 1930-present). Other Christian denominations have a small number of followers among Armenians, such as Catholics and Protestants.<sup>71</sup> Both denominations which were recognised

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<sup>71</sup> On Catholic and Protestant denominations, see : “Les Disputes Religieuses du XIV Siècle, Prélude des Division et du Statut Eccésiologique Postérieur de l’Eglise Arménienne”, B. L. Zekiyan, in “Les Lusignans et l’Outre-mer”, Poitier, 1995; “Le Patriarcat de Cilicie et les Arméniens Catholiques 1740-1812”, M. J Terzian,

as separate *millets*, had communities clustered in different parts of the Ottoman Empire. They also played an important role in the cultural life of Constantinople and Smyrna. For example the Protestant missionaries were instrumental in the diffusion of the vernacular. They published the Bible and other religious materials in the vernacular for religious propaganda.

### *The role of Mekhitarist monks*

The role and impact of Mekhitarist<sup>72</sup> monks in the formation of Armenian intellectual thought and the prompting of cultural and political revival was colossal. Mekhitar Sepasdatsi<sup>73</sup>, after long wanderings, finally established his Catholic order in Venice on the islet of San Lazzaro in 1717. Besides religious devotion, one of the Mekhitar's initiatives was to serve his people through enlightenment. This endeavour took the form of publications, education and scholarship. The scope of their interests encompassed a wide range of the humanistic subjects of the age. They soon established a printing house and published ancient texts in classical Armenian with historical, religious and literary content, such as *Badmoutyun Hayots* [History of the Armenians] by Ghazar Parbetsi (5<sup>th</sup> century chronologist) and *Kirk Bidoyits* [The Book of Useful Things] by Movses Khorenatsi. In 1786, Father Mikayel Chamchian<sup>74</sup> produced the three-volume *Badmoutyun Hayots*, the first comprehensive Armenian history in the modern sense of the word.

In linguistics they played a pioneering role; they composed grammatical books and compiled dictionaries. In listing a few of these remarkable achievements it is necessary to remember Mekhitar's volume of the first grammar book of vernacular Armenian *Tourn*

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Beyrouth, 1955; "Le Patriarcat Arménien Catholique de Cilicie au Temps de Grégoire Pierre VI 1812-184", V. Tékeéyan, Beyrouth, 1954; "Les Arméniens Catholiques dans l'Empire Ottoman", N. Setian, Rome, 1994.

<sup>72</sup> On Mkhitarist's cultural activities see *Mkhitarian Hopelian 1701-1901* [Mkhitarist Jubilee 1701-1901], Venice, 1901; *Yergharyuramyra Kraganagan Kordzouneyoutyun Yev Nshanavor Kordzichner Venedigo Mkhitarian Miapanoutian* [A Bicentennial of Literary activity and Renowned Activists of the Mkhitarist Brotherhood in Venice], P. Sarkisian, Venice, 1905; *Agnarg Me Vienagan Mkhitarian Miapanoutian Kragan Kordzouneyoutian Vra* [A Glimpse of the Literary Activity of the Viennese Mkhitarist Brotherhood], N. Aginian, Vienna, 1912; *Yergeri Zhoghovadzou* [Collected Works], Leo, vol. III (b), Yerevan: Hayasdan, 1973; "The Armenian Way of Modernity: Armenian Identity Between Tradition and Innovation, Specificity and Universality", Boghos Levon Zekian, Venice: Supernova/Eurasiatica 49, 1997; Rouben Paul Adalian "From Humanism to Rationalism: Armenian Scholarship in the Nineteenth Century", op. cit; "Mékhitar et l'Union des Chrétiens, J. Card Willebrands, "Pazmaveb", no. 147, Venice, 1977.

<sup>73</sup> Mekhitar Sepasdatsi (1676-1749), was born in Sepasdia (Armenia). As a disaffected priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church, this led him to convert to Catholicism. Inspired by the catholic monastic life, he first founded his order in Constantinople with 12 priests. Soon persecution followed the Apostolic Church and Mekhitar took refuge on the Greek island of Morea. After the Turkish invasion, he and his brotherhood were eventually established in Venice.

<sup>74</sup> Father Mikayel Chamchian (1738-1823), Venetian monk.

*Keraganoutian Ashkharhapar Lezvi* [The Door to the Grammar of Vernacular Language] in 1727; and *Parkirk Haigazian Lezvi* [Dictionary of the Armenian Language] (the first volume was published in 1749 and the second in 1769), which contained 100,000 entries. In 1866 in Vienna, Arsen Aydenian published a seminal book *Knagan Keraganoutyun Ashkharhapar Gam Arti Hayeren Lezvi* [A Critical Grammar of the Vernacular or Contemporary Armenian Language]. Through their writings the Mkhitarist scholars and writers purified classical Armenian of the dominance of the Latin language. Although fierce supporters of classical Armenian, they facilitated the introduction of vernacular Armenian by publishing religious materials in the vernacular for Catholic propaganda purposes. The *krapar* was the language of the Bible: as a religious people they had a duty to defend the language by which God had spoken in Armenian. They also regarded themselves as the custodians of the classical Armenian literary heritage and the *krapar* was the backbone of it. On the other hand, they had realised that the vernacular is the only means of communication and the only means to convey messages, either religious or secular.

Since education was the most important part of their activities, that could not be achieved without a language which was spoken by the members of the same community. Through education in the vernacular they enhanced the national awareness of Armenians.

Due to inter-communal disagreement, the brotherhood split into two, with one branch setting up its mission in Vienna in 1811 (reunited 2001). Both branches dedicated themselves to erudite scholarship, with the Viennese work characterized by more philological endeavours and the Venetian by literary production and a substantial input into translation. Both groups earned the credit of publishing the first scholarly journals in the Armenian milieu, namely *Pazmaveb* [Polyhistory] (Venice, 1843 to the present) and *Hantes Amsorya* [Monthly Journal] (Vienna, 1887 to the present).

### ***Educational Institutions***

The education of the “generation of orphans”<sup>75</sup> had paramount importance for all institutions in the service of Armenian communal life. The task started in earnest in the early period of the dispersion (from 1915) in the dire conditions of the refugee camps in the Middle East and elsewhere. Here the standard school curriculum was not applied and

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<sup>75</sup> The generation who had not reached adulthood during the Genocide were referred to as *vorperou serount* [the generation of orphans].

students were given basic language and religious education, together with an introduction to craft skills.<sup>76</sup> Principally the educational authorities did not have the infrastructure or the intellectual workforce to carry out educational tasks on a large scale. The orphans urgently needed to learn basic life skills in order to secure their physical survival. When communal life started to take shape the indispensability of a well-organised network of schools became imperative. The education of the new generation, which was based on Armenian values, after a while became part of the agenda for the construction of Armenian identity.

Debates centred on the kind of education to be provided to the new generation were promoted by conscientious intellectuals such as Levon Shant.<sup>77</sup> In an article<sup>78</sup> Shant locates education within a wider framework which encompasses many aspects of Armenian cultural spheres. First of all, he asserts that the preservation of Armenian identity within the new generation is linked to many factors, in particular to the language and literature. Continuing his line of thought on the new generation,<sup>79</sup> Shant argues that as this group are well versed in foreign languages, it naturally becomes the only window through which they are able to interact with outside cultures and thereby the only means through which to communicate with other societies held in esteem. This begs the questions why these outside languages are the sole agent linking Armenian youth to other cultures and why there is such a degree of reverence for them.

The writer refers to there being limited opportunity for this group to interact with high-quality Armenian literature because of the restricted number of books available. The sole link with Armenian culture effectively became the periodical press and newspapers, recognised at this time for their poor quality and crude mode of debate. Of course, the new generation did not want to be associated with this kind of "low, semi-savage, weak and backward existence",<sup>80</sup> or moreover to be identified with the culture that generates it. This was to be a severe blow to the preservation of Armenian identity, and would lead to a distortion of their

<sup>76</sup> See Raymond H. Kévorkian and Vahé Tachjian, "The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History, 1906-1940", op. cit., pp. 151-153.

<sup>77</sup> For the evaluation for Levon Shant's literary works see *Tsyunern I Ver (Menakroutyun L. Shanti Masin)* [Up to the Snows (Monograph on Levon Shant)], K. Shahinian, Beirut, 1967; *Mard*, Krikor Bldian, pp. 7-371, Antelias, 1997; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Hagop Oshagan, vol. VIII, pp. 279-358, Antelias, 1980; *Levon Shanti Grtoutian Desoutyuné* [The Educational Theory of Levon Shant], S. Sarinian, *Lraper* [Bearer of News], no. 6, 1990, 13-18.

<sup>78</sup> See *Kraganoutian Teré* [The Role of Literature], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (newspaper), no. 3527, 6<sup>th</sup> December, Boston, 1923.

<sup>79</sup> Levon Shant does not specify the cultural locality of this generation but in this period of his life he was based in Marseille.

<sup>80</sup> See Levon Shant, *Kraganoutian Teré*, loc. cit.

self-perceived image as the organic part of “an honest, cultured, hardworking, apt and creative race”.<sup>81</sup> This in itself, Shant suggests, diminishes in them the particular traits of their Armenian character, along with the resolve of struggle and the aspiration for independence.<sup>82</sup> He also argues that the struggle will ennoble their personality and forge their moral character as well as generate a reverence towards the effortful struggle for the survival of Armenians, their culture in general, and their language and literature specifically.

Here I would like to comment very briefly on some of these issues. First of all, Levon Shant underscores the importance of the self-confidence of the new generation, which is dependent upon the image of Armenians, in effect how they see themselves and how they could be seen by others. At this crucial juncture of history, when the Armenian people is entering a new phase in its collective life, in order to survive it, according to Shant, it must show the utmost organisation and responsibility. After the loss of everything that the Armenians had held dearly, the new generation would be the only foundation on which the Armenian communities could be built. Here, the wellbeing of the “nation” is contingent upon the reformation of specific aspects of Armenian life, among them the restitution of proficient, intellectually charged cultural debate. This would aim to entice younger generations to interact with their culture and thereby to enhance a sense of “ethnic” belonging. The second point is intrinsically interwoven with the first: the new generation would need an unshaken foothold, and for that reason, the construction of their identity should include the most vital components, which are: the particularity of being Armenian (with respect to language, literature and other expressions of culture); the adaptability to the new socio-political situation and the acquisition of the skills to forge ahead; and independence, either culturally or politically (the political aspect will be discussed later).

The question of what should be done in order to secure the preservation of the Armenian identity was also in part addressed by Levon Shant, with solutions offered. He states the necessity for access to books for the new generation, so that everyone is able to communicate with his/her culture. He also advocates that language (without specifying the Armenian dialect he is concerned with) should become the vehicle for expression not only of Armenian “noble thoughts and creations”, but also “of other nations”.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Shant's implication was clear that in this way the youth would have the opportunity to interact with universal ideas within the boundaries of their "ethnic" language, and would internalise these ideas through the reasoning of their language. This leads to the next point, which is the spiritual independence of the youth. Armenian people, Shant suggests, should be self-sufficient in terms of the provision of the necessary literature for educational or other purposes. The youth must have access to information in Armenian, so that they will not "be dragged by the tail of the literatures of other nations, forced to beg, and chasing after other languages".<sup>84</sup> In effect the Armenian language and literature of this period had to take a prominent role in the shaping of the identity of future Armenians. Shant's attitude was not an intolerant or parochial posture based on xenophobia; on the contrary it celebrates universal diversity and uniqueness through the Armenian language.

One can observe similar cultural developments in 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, when after the invention of the alphabet the clergy engaged themselves in intensive translation activities, first of the Bible and then of religious and philosophical works. These efforts intensified and the scope of their interest broadened in a shape of cultural movement called hellenophile. The followers of this school translated from Greek an array of literature, which included religious, philosophical and grammatical works as well as some on the natural sciences. One of the main reasons for these frenetic cultural activities was the Armenianisation of Western thought and culture: cultural autonomy would be a firm foothold for the survival of Armenians.<sup>85</sup>

Levon Shant was not the only intellectual who eagerly believed that the progress of the Armenian people and the maintenance of Armenian identity were inherently linked to the existence of a morally, emotionally and intellectually healthy younger generation. Vahan Tekeyian<sup>86</sup> (see Appendix) shared similar visions and hopes, and showed great interest towards young talents.<sup>87</sup> As editor of the newspaper *Arev* he publishes a letter<sup>88</sup> written by an

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> On this subject see "La Chronographie Grecque Chrétienne De L'antiquité Tardive Et Sa Réception Dans L'historiographie Arménienne", Christian Hannik, pp. 143-155, in "La Diffusione dell'eredità Classica Nell'età Tardoantica E Medievale. Il "Romanzo Di Alessandro" e Altri Scritti", Rosa Bianca and Alfredo Valvo (eds.), Alessandria: Edizione dell'Orso, 1998.

<sup>86</sup> For the evaluation of Vahan Tekeyian's works see *Vahan Tekeyian Ipr Hanrayin Mart Yev Hrabaragakir* [Vahan Tekeyian as a Public Figure and Social Commentator], A. Alboyajian, Beirut, 1988; *Vahan Tekeyian: Gyanké Yev Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné* [The Life and Works of Vahan Tekeyian], L. Asmarian, Yerevan, 1971; *Vahan Tekeyian*, S. Yeremian, *Pazmaveb*, vol. 90, pp. 497-512, Venice, 1933; *Spyurké Yev Irav Panasdeghdzoutyné (Vahan Tekeyiani Aritov)*, H. Oshagan, Jerusalem, 1945.

<sup>87</sup> One of his protégés was the poet Levon-Zaven Surmelian (1907-1995).

orphan,<sup>89</sup> a college student in France, in his late teens. The reason for the publication was, as Tekeyian puts it, to offer solace to the adults, and to motivate the youth, so that by following his example they will enhance their “self-awareness” and will “freely activate their minds”.<sup>90</sup> In his letter the orphan talks about his education and his preparation for the baccalaureate exams. He shows his intellectual clarity when he reflects upon philosophical topics, specifically on the nature of philosophy as he discusses Zeno, Kant and Hegel. His reflection then turns towards the contemporary Armenian literature of diaspora. Here he severely criticises several of the writers of the new generation, accusing them of self-indulgence and, rather embarrassingly, complains that during history lessons the names of Armenians are always associated with massacre. The orphan also launches a scathing attack against the political leadership by holding them responsible for all the misfortunes and sufferings of the “nation” and he considers how they are pursuing the same divisive policies in Armenian communities through stirring up trouble among them. He even accuses the “ignorant”<sup>91</sup> elements of youth who are credulously following them. Finally he concludes that “the political leaders, after burying the homeland, are now striving to turn the new generation into blunt-minded citizens”.<sup>92</sup>

This young man was the archetype of what Shant and people like him were attaching their hopes to for the revival of the “nation”. Vahan Tekeyian, enchanted by his clear-sightedness and rationality, in a single line concludes “what is there to add to this letter, not to spoil the freshness and vigour of his soul”.<sup>93</sup>

The vision of the intellectuals and writers to generate a liberal, diverse and broad-minded generation remained a cherished wish, linked to personal more than collective efforts. The reality on the ground painted a slightly different picture. The parochialism in some educational institutions, especially ones which were founded or had fallen under the influence of the political parties, was commonplace. These institutions were regarded by the political parties as ideal launching pads for their ideological propaganda. Armenian schools,

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<sup>88</sup> The letter was received two years prior to its publication. It was published under the rubric of “Editorial”, no name is mentioned of the sender. The letter seems to be edited. An introductory part was added without any signature. Bearing in mind that Vahan Tekeyian was the editor of the newspaper during the years 1915-1920, and 1927-1929 (See *RAG-i Mamouli Khmpakirneré* [The Editors of LDP Printed Press], Hovig Eordekian, Yerevan, 2005), it is most likely the letter was edited and published by him. See *Nor Serounti Tsayn* [The Voice of the New Generation], editorial, *Arev* [Sun], no. 2771, 21<sup>st</sup> March, Cairo, 1928.

<sup>89</sup> Most probably he had lost his parents during the atrocities in 1915. There is however no mention of this.

<sup>90</sup> *Nor Serounti Tsayn*, loc. cit.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

especially in the Middle East, have always been directly or indirectly affiliated with or influenced by them. They indoctrinated the young and vied for their loyalty. Through the network of these institutions the parties forged the sectarian identity of their future ideological zealots or *kaghapari zinvor* [soldiers of ideology]. The ideological machinery of the parties imbued the diasporan youth with a nationalistic ideology, and contributed in forging a sectarian mindset which took the form of hatred against the Turks and intolerance towards those of other political persuasions. Thus the parameters of “ethnic” space were subdivided into multiple, small ideological entities. In this kind of environment the parochial approach in evaluating human values in general, and “ethnic” values in particular, became widespread.

### **Diasporan Identities in Crisis**

Although Armenians share the same religion and a degree of cultural semblance, heterogeneity remained the intrinsic characteristic of their identity. Demographically, the new diasporan communities were represented by Armenians from every corner and every sector of society within the Ottoman Empire and Russian Armenia. These people from diverse cultural environments, with their assorted political and religious creeds, coalesced in this newly created “ethnic” space that encompassed heterogeneous and multilayered Armenian identities. Principally three factors contributed to the formation of the diversity of diasporan identity. Firstly, the multilocal<sup>94</sup> character of the Armenian population accentuated diversity in terms of language (local dialect), lore, customs and cuisine. Secondly, political divisions left their own indelible mark as people were identified according to political allegiance. A third divisive element – to a much lesser extent, it must be said – were the differences on religious grounds in accordance with the three Armenian denominations of Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant. These intersecting lines of demarcation, if at first grounds for celebrating diversity, had definite negative implications with regard to political and religious divisions and it is a commonly held view that political struggles enfeebled the potential of Armenian communities throughout the world.

Notwithstanding these divisive elements, there were areas of common ground on which to face the challenges of daily life. These new challenges stemmed from the development of

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<sup>94</sup> I borrow this term from Razmik Panossian. See “The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars”. London: Hurst & Company, 2006, pp. 128-187.



new socio-political and cultural environments. In new settings the Armenian elite had to overhaul their strategies and adapt to local cultures.

Of the fundamental bases for Armenian unification, the shared experience of Genocide and its traumatic repercussion of exile loomed large. The pain of Genocide had stricken all Armenians, both victims and otherwise and no matter what their religious or political creed, and this had naturally invoked deep hatred towards its perpetrators. With exile, survivors were driven into unfamiliar environments and were faced with common challenges for survival. The local natural cultural barriers, along with the shared experience of trauma, incarcerated various communities within their "ethnic" boundaries. On the basis of this very recent collective experience of "ethnic" annihilation, along with the silent complicity, disregard and lack of any empathy shown by other nations towards the sufferings of the Genocide survivors, the emotional sphere of Armenians and their perception of the world were shaped. Armenian communities would nurture distrust towards the "Other", and this became the main component of alienation from their environment. This sense of estrangement became ingrained in the Armenian diasporan psyche for a generation or so and the Armenian "national" ego was demolished, making everyday survival both difficult and painful. The distrust held towards the "Other" occasioned the creation of an ethnocentric view of the world and the so-called "human values" of the outside "civilised world" were not to be trusted as a consequence. Outside the "ethnic" space lay hostile territory, where "national" identity could be eroded, and boundaries were safeguarded from any hostile infiltration. This was the space within which Armenian "ethnic" identity would breathe in order to facilitate the *koyadevoun* [survival] of Armenians. The word *koyadevoun* here has connotations of not only physical, but also of cultural survival. The dangers of *tsouloun* [assimilation] was looming and Armenians needed to establish safe footholds within the diaspora in order to save what was left of their cultural heritage.

In this context, the *odar* [alien, foreign/er, "Other"] is the bugbear to be guarded from. But who was the *odar* and what was the application of the word in different Armenian communities? The *odar* is essentially that which is non-Armenian or alien, who racially, religiously, linguistically or culturally does not associate itself with the Armenian collective. It refers also to the foreign characteristics and traits which are incompatible with Armenian "ethnic" values.

The significance of the term has differed according to the society in which it was used. In Middle Eastern communities the *odar* was either non-Muslim Arab, or Muslim Arabs

identified as *dajig* (Muslim) or *aylazk* [from a different nation]. Although after the Genocide Armenians were generally accommodated across Arab countries as refugees; the posture of Armenians towards the Muslim Arab population was for the most part if not dismissive then surely extremely cautious. Another motive for the formation of this attitude were the circumstances surrounding the deportations of Armenians through the Syrian deserts. Instigated by mainly Muslim Arab tribes of the desert, survivors experienced appalling acts of violence, including the abduction of orphans and females, forced conversion to Islam, forced marriage and hard labour. Shortly after the foundation of the refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, elements in the Arab population in those named countries began to regard the Armenian presence suspiciously. It was the classic case of inhospitality towards foreigners. In limited cases there were persecutions against Armenian refugees by Arab nationalists. All these factors to some extent fuelled distrust towards Arabs among the refugees.

Moreover the anti-Muslim sentiment nurtured by Armenians was further engendered by the analogy made between Muslim Turks and the Muslim population of the Middle East in general. The hatred against the Genocide perpetrators and their association on religious grounds with the Islamic world was embedded in the collective consciousness of Armenians, raising invisible barriers between the two cultures.

The perception of the *odar* in Armenian communities of the West (primarily mainly North America and Western Europe) in turn was largely based on the bitter experience of political betrayal by Western states. The promised and long-awaited Western political intervention before the Genocide, which was intended to ease Armenian suffering in Ottoman Turkey, had never materialised. Furthermore, the apathy of political intervention during the Genocide injected refugees with a sense of distrust towards the “hypocritical” Western societies and their values. The alienation of survivors from their immediate *odar* environments in the West was very short lived. Following generations put any bitterness behind them, adopting more open and positive attitudes towards their host societies. This process of integration however was also regarded as a danger to the preservation of “ethnic” identity, although the erosion of the “ethnic” demarcations in Western Armenian communities would eventually lead to assimilation. This process was figuratively presented as *jermag chart* or “white massacre” as opposed to “Turkish massacres” or “the massacres in Turkish territories”, and referred to the bloodless “massacre” of Armenian cultural heritage in the diaspora.

## Chapter Two

### Armenian Print Culture

#### Newspapers, Periodicals and Literary Magazines

##### *The pre-Genocide printed press*

The printed press<sup>95</sup> in pre-Genocide Armenian communities in dispersion had long established traditions. Its genesis was associated with the name of Rev. Haroutyun Shmavonian, who published the first Armenian journal *Aztarar* [Monitor] in 1794 in Madras both in vernacular and *krapar* (classical Armenian). But the press in its most established form did not appear until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it developed apace with the tide of national revival mainly in the Armenian cultural centres in Constantinople, Smyrna, Tiflis, Moscow, and other Armenian communities around the world.

In Moscow Mikayel Nalpantian<sup>96</sup> and Sdepanos Nazariants<sup>97</sup> the two pre-eminent liberals of the time published *Hyusisapayl* [Northern Lights] (1858-1864). In Tiflis the first Armenian paper *Govgas* [Caucasus] was published (in classical Armenian) in 1846 as an Armenian supplement to the Russian paper *Kavkaz*.<sup>98</sup> Soon after, many periodicals and newspapers were published in Tiflis, namely *Ararad* (1850-1851), *Meghou Hayasdani* [Bee of Armenia] (1858-1886), *Ports* [Attempt] (1876-1881) and *Nor Tar* [New Century] (1884-1916). But the most renowned paper was *Mshag* [Tiller] (1872-1921) published by Krikor Ardzrouni, who promulgated very liberal ideas through his writings and launched a vigorous campaign against the conservative elements within the society of Tiflis, which were centred

<sup>95</sup> On this subject consult the following sources: *Badmoutyun Hay Lrakroutian, I Sgzpane Minchev Mer Orere* [History of the Armenian Printed Press, from its Beginnings to the Present Day], Hayr Krikoris Kalemkearian, vol. I, Vienna, 1893; *Hay Barperagan Mamouli Badmoutyunits* [From the History of the Armenian Periodical Press], (collective work), Yerevan, 1963; *Bolsahay Mamouli Yev Hrabaragakhosoutian Sgzpnavoroume* [The Beginning of the Constantinople Armenian Printed Press and the Social Commentary], V. K. Ghougasian, Yerevan, 1975; *Zmiurnahay Barperagan Mamoule* (1839-1860 tt.) [The Armenian Periodical Press of Smyrna (1839-1860)], M. N. Hagopian, Yerevan, 1984.

<sup>96</sup> Mikayel Nalpantian (1829-1866) was an Armenian poet and liberal thinker.

<sup>97</sup> Sdepanos Nazariants (1812-1879) was a liberal activist.

<sup>98</sup> The Russian publication first issued in 1841.

around the conservative papers of *Nor Tar* and *Artsakank* [Echo] (1882-1884). It is also worth mentioning the monthly *Mourj* [Hammer] (1889-1907) for its important role in enhancing the literary taste of Armenian literati.

The first Armenian journal in Ottoman Turkey was the Armenian supplement to the official journal of the Sublime Porte *Lro Kir* <sup>99</sup> [Letter of News] published in Constantinople in 1832. In the following decades scores of media outlets were published in Constantinople such as *Panaser* [Philologist] (1851-1852, 1859), *Noyian Aghavni* [The Dove of Noah] (1852-1853), and *Meghou* [Bee] (1856-1865, 1870-1874). Two journals provided the bedrock of the progressive forces in Constantinople, namely *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (1870-1896, 1909-1910) and *Arevelk* [East] (1884-1896, 1898-1912). The conservative camp was gathered around *Pyuzantion* [Byzantine] (1896-1918). *Masis* (1852-1908, Constantinople) had played a crucial role in raising the important literary issues of the time, namely the literary questionnaire dedicated to the literature of tomorrow launched by the initiative of Ardashes Haroutyunian in 1900.

All these journals published on a variety of topics, including literature and in addition to them a small number of publications were dedicated mainly to literature. One such journal was *Dzaghigh* [Flower] (1886-1911, Constantinople), of which one of the editors was the erudite literary critic Arshag Chobanian (1895, 17 issues).<sup>100</sup> The journal became the platform for the experimental work of Chobanian's first critical writings, and a literary springboard for many other men of letters. The eccentric poet and thinker Yeghia Demirjibashian published two periodicals in Constantinople, namely *Kragan Yev Imasdasiragan Sharzhoun* [The Literary and Philosophical Movement] (1883-1888) and *Yergrakount* [Globe] (1883-1888). The ground-breaking moment was the publication of an innovative literary monthly, *Mehian* [Pagan Temple] (1914, Constantinople), around which a group of avant-garde writers (by the Armenian standards of the time) were gathered, including Gosdan Zarian, Hagop Kyufejian, Taniel Varoujan, Kegham Parseghian and Aharon. Although it was short-lived (seven issues), it marked a watershed in Armenian literature in both East and West (this will be treated later).

Together with other cultural outlets the journal *Arshalouys Araradian* [Dawn of Ararat] (1840), put Smyrna on the cultural map of the Western Armenians. Mateos Mamourian kept

<sup>99</sup> The Turkish version was named *Takvimé Vakayi*.

<sup>100</sup> On this subject see "Dzaghigh" *Hantesé Arshag Chobaniani Khmpakroutiamp* [The Journal "Dzaghigh" under the Editorship of Arshag Chobanian], Y. Avedisian, *Panper Yerevani Hamalsarani* [Yerevan University Courier], no. 2, pp.137-145, Yerevan, 1986.

up the pace of progress in Smyrna by publishing *Arevelian Mamoul* [Eastern Press] (1871-1909, 1919-1922).

Also in the periphery of the main Armenian cultural centres in the Armenian communities in the world the printed press became the solid ground of the promulgation of human values and for the promotion of Armenian culture. The Mkhitarist fathers were at the forefront of this cultural activity. Just five years after publication of *Aztarar* in 1799 they published the periodical *Darekroutyun* [Annals] (published until 1802), which was followed by *Yeghanag Pyuzantian* [Byzantine Tune] (1803-1820) and *Tidag Pyuzantian* [Byzantine Observer] (1812-1816) all printed in San Lazzaro. What made these publications unique was the fact that the language was vernacular.

While the Armenian revival was gathering pace in Constantinople and Smyrna, Sdepan Vosganian, at the heart of the tumultuous changes in Paris, published two bi-weeklies, *Arevelk* [East] (1855-1856) and *Arevmoudk* [West] (1859, 1864-1865). Inspired by the French revolution and the liberal ideas of the enlightenment, Vosganian's journals served as a podium for the ideas to which he subscribed.<sup>101</sup> This blowing northern air of liberalism had a great impact on the development of Armenian political and social thinking within Ottoman Turkey, thereby hastening the process of change.

The Hamidian<sup>102</sup> massacres and persecutions prompted a new wave of Armenian migration to Western and Eastern countries. A considerable number of intellectuals and writers from Constantinople took refuge in different European cities and they joined other Armenian dissidents, who fled the Turkish persecutions. Abroad these intellectuals had the opportunity to exercise their right of freedom and make their voices heard. Such voices had already been heard on the political platform, namely in the publications of the official organs of the Armenian parties *Hnchag*<sup>103</sup> [Bell] (SDHP) and *Troshag*<sup>104</sup> [Flag] (ARF). But the most influential publication was *Armenia* (1885-1923, Marseilles), published by Mgrdich

<sup>101</sup> On this subject see *Sdepan Vosganiané Yev Nra Michavayré* [Sdepan Vosgan and his Milieu], Mikayel Hagopian, Yerevan, 2005.

<sup>102</sup> In response to Armenian demands for reform in the Armenian provinces, Sultan Abdul-Hamid II was firm in his resolve not to concede. He instigated the brutal suppression in the Armenian provinces and in Constantinople which took the lives of thousands of Armenians from 1895 to 1896 (there is no precise estimate of the Armenian victims, but the figure is between 100,000-200,000).

<sup>103</sup> It was intermittently published in different cities (1887-1891, Geneva; 1892-1894, Athens; 1891, 1894, 1904-1915, Paris; 1894-1904, London).

<sup>104</sup> It was published in Geneva (1891-1914) and Paris (1925-1934). The publication was continued in different European and Middle Eastern cities. Now it is published in Yerevan.

Portougalian.<sup>105</sup> As a liberal, he disseminated progressive views on the plight of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and thus had a huge impact on Armenian political thinking. Fresh voices added to this choir on a different note, as when Arshag Chobanian, for instance, published his renowned literary journal *Anahid* in Paris (1898-1911, 1929-1940, 1946-1949). In the same year in England two discrete initiatives produced two literary and political journals. First, Arpiar Arpiarian published *Nor Giank* [New Life] (1898-1902) in London, and then Souren Bartevean and Alexander Shaklian published *Vaghvan Tsayné* [The Voice of Tomorrow] (1898) in Manchester.

On the other side of the Atlantic there were newly emerging Armenian communities across the United States, which proliferated due to the influx of refugees from the 1895-1896 Hamidian massacres. Despite all the financial difficulties and geographical remoteness which had hindered earlier Armenian intellectuals, a group of them took the initiative in organising the cultural life of the Armenian communities in America. The most vigorous figure in this task was Hayg Eginian, who published many journals, namely *Arekag* [Sun] (1888, West Hoboken), *Sourhantag* [Courier] (1889-1890, New York, West Hoboken), *Azadoutyun* [Freedom] (1890-1892, New York), *Dikris* [Tigris] (1897-1899, New York), *Kaghakatsi* [Citizen] (1902-1909, Fresno) and *Nor Serount* [New Generation] (1909, Fresno). At the turn of the century a number of journals and newspapers were published through personal initiatives and by political parties, such as *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (1899-1900, New York; 1900-1991, Boston), *Kraser* [Bibliophile] (1904, Arlington), *Araks* (1905-1906, Boston; 1907, New York), *Ardziv* [Eagle] (1905-1906, 1908, Boston), *Azk* [Nation] (1907-1921, Boston) and *Asbarez* [Arena] (1908- present, Los Angeles).

As for Middle East, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the main cultural centre was Cairo, and to a lesser extent Alexandria. The first Armenian journal was *Armaveni* [Palm Tree] (1865, Cairo), and during the following decades scores of journals were published, such as *Paros* [Lighthouse] (1897-1898, 1901-1902, Cairo), *Arshalouys* [Dawn] (1899-1905, 1908-1914, Cairo), *Nor Or* [New Day] (1900-1901, Cairo), *Neghos* [Nile] (1889, Alexandria), and *Lraper* [Messenger] (1897-1906, Alexandria).

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<sup>105</sup> Mgrdich Portoukalian (1848-1921) was an educator, political activist and dissident, who settled in Marseilles in 1885.

*The post-Genocide printed press in the diaspora*

After the Genocide the activities of the Armenian printed press gathered momentum. However, in some Armenian communities the printed media had already been in existence for some time.

The uprooted political parties, their affiliates and/or their admirers wasted no time in diasporan communities creating their ideological platform, namely the printed press. The political bickering, which by then had well-established traditions, again manifested itself in the context of the evaluation of recent historical events of great importance. Therefore, the printed media in the post-Genocide diaspora from the early years of its formation was highly politicised. It became the battleground for political, and to a lesser extent ideological, strife. Most of the time the nature of these arguments violated all the barriers of propriety; the rhetoric was noxious and on occasions amounted to mud-slinging and a senseless war of words. In order to give a flavour of the derogatory political rhetoric I will quote Onig Mekhitarian, who labels the anti-ARF criticism in the printed press of their political adversaries as “a concert of savage voices and ignorant mobs”<sup>106</sup> and “a dishonourable tumult”<sup>107</sup>, which “sounds fake and unworthy”.<sup>108</sup> Literature in general and literary criticism in particular – both of which were inherently linked to the printed press – were tainted by political rhetoric and the feud; sometimes the literary issues overlapped the political ones or vice versa (see Chapter One).

Against all odds an independent press did exist, consisting mostly in publications which had non-political content, such as artistic journals and the printed press representing other domains of interest. Dirty intrigues and intimidation of the independent media was also part of the Armenian media culture. Hrand Palouyian complains of the crusade against his literary journal *Zvartnots* (intermittently from 1929 until 1967, Paris) instigated by the circles of his Parisian counterpart, namely the newspaper *Harach*, which was closely affiliated with the ARF party. He accuses them of hindering his literary activities by encouraging the contributors of *Zvartnots* not to lend their moral and practical support to the periodical.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> See *Tavanapokhi Mé Namagé* [Letter of an Apostate], *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 4344, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1926, Boston.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> See *Zvartnots*, no. 5, Septemder, p. 239, Paris, 1929.

The geographical distribution of the publication of the Armenian printed press in diaspora was extensive, including almost all continents. While the new communities in the post-Genocide diaspora were in the process of re-organisation, Constantinople and to a lesser extent Smyrna once again became the hub of the cultural activities of Western Armenians. This short time of activity stretched from Armistice in 1918 until the fall of Constantinople to Mustafa Kemal's nationalist army in 1922.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the end of the atrocities committed against the Armenian population brought new hope to Armenians for rebuilding their ruined collective life. The result was the revival of the Armenian way of life in the densely Armenian-populated urban centres. This firm resolve generated a wave of publishing activities. From 1918 to 1923 around 75 journals were published in Constantinople which covered many domains of interest, such as politics, society, medicine, law, art and literature. Many of these journals were short lived largely due to lack of financial resources. The literary journal *Partsravank* [High Monastery] (1922, Constantinople, 6 issues) brought together the heavyweights of Western Armenian literature, namely Vahan Tekeyian, Hagop Oshagan and Gosdan Zarian. Vrtanes Mardigian, Shavarsh Misakian and Hagop Sirouni successively published *Artaramard* [Battle for Justice] (1918, Constantinople, 12 issues), and *Ariamard* [Battle of the Brave] (Constantinople, 1918, 19 issues). The same trio with the collaboration of Kourken Mkhitarian and others published the journal *Jagadamard* [Battle] (Constantinople, 1914-1915, 1918-1924). The other publications were *Yerevan* (1918-1920, 85 issues) *Azadamard* [Battle for Freedom] (1909-1914, 1918-1921), *Yergir* [Country] (1919-1922) all published in Constantinople. Even in this highly-charged atmosphere Armenians were not short of humour, as a number of satirical journals published in Constantinople attest, such as *Khelok Tavit* [Clever David] (1918-1919, 39 issues) and *Sadana* [Devil] (1918-1919).

In Smyrna, another vibrant urban cultural centre in Ottoman Turkey, around 10 journals were published. The central figure in these activities was Andon Gazel, one of the publishers of the short-lived literary journal *Adroushan* [Pagan Temple] (1919, 7 issues), and newspapers *Horizon* (1919-1922) and *Koyamard* [Battle of Survival] (1920, 83 issues).



### Geographical Distribution of the post-Genocide Diasporan Printed Press

Only a few Armenian communities around the world were the centres of literary production. Of these, in 1920s France (Paris and Marseille), USA (Boston and New York), Egypt (Cairo), and to a lesser extent Greece (Athens and Salonica) played leading role.

#### France

Between the period of the two wars Paris was the hub of the printing activities among the diasporan communities. Of these publications, *Harach* [Forward] (1925-1940, 1945-present, Paris), edited and published by Shavarsh Misakian was one of the most influential Armenian newspapers. Misakian widely published literary materials, especially those written by new writers. It was the nexus of literary activities, not only in France but in the wider Armenian dispersion. Many writers and critics made their respected names through the pages of this newspaper, such as Shavarsh Nartouni, Paylag Sanasar, Vazken Shoushanian, Nigoghos Sarafian and others. It was in this newspaper that Shahan Shahnour published in instalments his controversial novel *Nahanché Arants Yerki* [Retreat Without Song] (1929).

As was the case in other Armenian communities in France, the media was divided along political lines. *Harach* also fell into the pattern of this division owing to the political convictions of Shavarsh Misakian. His allegiance towards the ARF party made his outlet the mouthpiece of the party, although it should be mentioned that it did not become the official party organ. On the other side of the divide the printed press made heard its vociferous anti-ARF voices and countered every political challenge posed by the ARF party. The arch-enemies of *Harach* were *Yerevan* (1925-1930, Paris) and *Abaka* [Future] (1920-1940; 1946-1949, Paris). The former was the mouthpiece of the Soviet Armenian authorities in diaspora and it was in this journal that Zabel Yesayian launched her diatribe against the anti-Soviet camp, especially against the forces gathered around *Harach*. Another important publication was Chobanian's acclaimed literary journal *Anahid*, which promoted Armenian literary traditions.<sup>110</sup> During the period stretching from 1917 to 1928 around 33 media outlets were published in Paris and around 10 in Marseille. Of these, it is worth remembering the names of some journals, such as *Veradznount* [Revival] (1917-1921, Paris), *Zeytoun* (1920, Paris, 2

<sup>110</sup> On this subject see '*Anahid*' *Hantesé* [The Journal "Anahid"], Y. Avedisian, Yerevan, 1999.

issues), *Arakadz* (1926, Paris, 24 issues) and *Tsolk* [Reflection] (1928, Paris, 6 issues), and *Nor Havadk* [New Faith] (1924, Marseille, 1 issue).

## Egypt

Cairo was the hub of Armenian journalistic activities in the Middle East. The pivotal publication was *Housaper* (1913-present, Cairo), which became the beacon for the promotion of Armenian values and the forging of diasporan identity. From 1923 it was the official organ of the ARF party and as such it followed the line of the party's politics, thus becoming one of ARF's most important mouthpieces. The literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoun* [New Movement] (1923-1924, Cairo) played a significant role in foregrounding the outstanding issues of the future literature of the diaspora, thus contributing to its shaping. The names of the two literary critics Kourken Mkhitarian and Peniamin Tashian are intrinsically linked to both publications and both are central figures in the literary critical productions of these publications from the 1920s onwards.

Another important publication was *Arev* (1915-1924, Alexandria; 1924-present, Cairo), which covered a wide range of issues including one of literary significance. One of its editors was Vahan Tekeyian, a renowned poet from the Constantinople generation. Being the official organ of LDP meant that it had to meet the political challenges posed by *Housaper* and the printed press of the ARF party.

## USA

I briefly mentioned above the contribution of Hayg Eginian in the development of the Armenian printed press in America in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the beginning of the 1920s scores of media outlets came into being, the most prominent being the ARF party official organ *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] newspaper (1899-1900, New York; 1900-1991, Boston) and its literary supplement *Hayrenik* monthly (Boston, 1922-1970). Both of these were instrumental in helping to shape Armenian literature in the post-Genocide diaspora and they played the same role in America as *Harach* had played in France. Roupén Tarpinian (see Appendix), the editor of the monthly edition of *Hayrenik*, had a very lenient policy regarding the publication of literary texts, based on the spirit of encouragement. For him to give a platform to the youth was a gesture of support. It was in *Hayrenik* monthly that

the acclaimed writer Hamasdegh published the best part of his literature, before compiling his short stories in two collections *Kyughé* [The Village] (1924, Boston) and *Antsrevé* [The Rain] (1929, Paris). Other prominent publications were *Hayasdani Gochnag* [Bell of Armenia] (1900-1968, Boston and later New York), *Pyunig* [Phoenix] (1918-1920, Boston), *Navasart* (1922, New York), and *Baykar* [Struggle] (1922-1982, Boston). Each of these journals played a significant role in promoting diasporan literature and arts. From 1918 to 1928 around 84 journals and periodicals were published all over the USA.

## Greece

Ironically the Armenian literature in the land of boundless literary imagination and reasoning was not as prosperous as it should have been. This was due to two factors, these being the extreme poverty of Armenian refugees in Greece and the perception of that country as a transit point to the final destinations of France and Latin America.<sup>111</sup> Therefore a constant influx of Armenian refugees slackened the process of establishing a cultural infrastructure and failed to attract human resources. For these reasons the printed press in Greece in terms of quality and quantity had only modest achievements. From 1918 to 1928 around 13 journals were published in Athens, and around 17 journals in different parts of Greece, such as Corfu, Salonica and Piraeus. Some of these publications were *Nor Or* [New Day] (1923-1940, 1944, Athens; from 1927 it published a literary, political and scientific supplement *Dedragner* [Notebooks]),<sup>6</sup> Athens) and *Olimbos* (1926-1928, Salonica).

## The Content of the Armenian Printed Press

### *Pre-Genocide period*

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the outbreak of World War I the Armenian printed press like any other printed outlets elsewhere had covered a range of topics, such as politics, religion, social issues, arts, literature, etc. For my own purposes I will concentrate on the Western Armenian-written printed press in pre-Genocide Constantinople, Smyrna and dispersion. As

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<sup>111</sup> See "The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History, 1906-1940" vol. I, op. cit, p. 220.

far as the content and the development of the Armenian printed press is concerned there were three phases.<sup>112</sup>

The primary phase, from the 1840s until the enthronement of Abdul-Hamid II in 1876, was a period when scores of issues were fiercely debated and the printed press became the only battleground for the rival camps, namely the liberals on one side and conservatives and clerics on the other. The most important of these were as follows: a) the religious strife between Apostolic and Catholic Armenians; b) the curtailment of the dominance of *amiras*<sup>113</sup> in control of the state of affairs in the Armenian community;<sup>114</sup> c) the introduction of the vernacular; d) the social and political reforms within Turkey; and e) other community issues.

The second phase began with the reign of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1876-1909) whose repressive and brutal methods in silencing voices of dissent had detrimental consequences for the development of Western Armenian journalism.<sup>115</sup> Under the watchful eyes of the censors the range of topics decreased and the content of the printed press was depoliticised. It was in this period (specifically the mid 1880s) that the realist traditions in Western Armenian literature became an established trend, targeting the source of social evils, namely the corrupt Armenian high classes and the unscrupulous traders. The springboard of the realist writers was the newspaper *Arevelk*, which brought together prominent writers such as Arpiar Arpiarian, Levon Pashalian, Krikor Zohrab, Hrant, Dikran Gamsaragan and Yeroukhan. They were instrumental in the establishment of the Realism in Western Armenian literature.

Alongside the Realists the Romantics were also still creatively active, and the debates between them and the Realists around literary issues were commonplace. This coupled with the first serious efforts to evaluate the literary products contributed to the development of literary criticism from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The only authentic voice of Armenian political thought in this period was to be found in the printed press abroad, especially Europe, where there was no restraint on freedom of speech.

The third phase stretched from the declaration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908 to the eve of the War in 1914. The abolition of the restrictions gave new impetus to the development of the printed press for a short period. Violently suppressed voices found their

<sup>112</sup> This periodisation is based on my own observations.

<sup>113</sup> *Amiras* were an enormously influential class of affluent entrepreneurs who wielded great power in administering community affairs.

<sup>114</sup> This struggle was led by liberals and supported by the middle and lower classes in Constantinople and Smyrna.

<sup>115</sup> On this matter see: *Arevmdahay Barperagan Mamoulé Yev Kraknoutyuné Osmanian Tourkiayium (1857-1908)* [Western Armenian Periodical Press and Censorship in Ottoman Turkey (1857-1908)], A. A. Kharadian, Yerevan, 1989.

targets of criticism and all kinds of issues made their way on to the pages of the journals and periodicals.

### *Post-Genocide period 1918-1928*

The early post-Genocide printed press in diaspora reflected the horrors of the catastrophe, the political disillusionments and the current state of affairs of Armenians. The main themes of the majority of the non-literary publications, such as the newspapers were about the efforts of retrieving and housing the Armenian orphans, the state of the refugees in the refugee camps, and issues concerning the political fate of the Armenian people, such as the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and the Lausanne Treaty (1923). The late 1910s and early 1920s saw a negligible amount of literary material being published. Three reasons may account for this: literature was not a priority; there was a shortage of human resources; the four pages of the newspapers were not enough to accommodate all the interests of their readership. As they were short of space the editors were obliged to employ a selection procedure for the materials and of course they gave priority to daily news coverage and the issues of great importance; they did not have the financial resources to increase the original four-page format or to pay the extra expenses of honoraria of the writers.

From 1923 onwards the scope of the issues of the non-literary press grew. Apart from community issues, the emotional and intellectual welfare of the refugees was also discussed. The education of the new generation became one of the hot topics of the time. This was seen as the integral part of their “ethnic” survival by many intellectuals, who contributed to the ongoing discourse. The importance of literature and art in the above-mentioned efforts was also discussed.

During this period Soviet Armenia came on to the scene of the political debate against the backdrop of the inter-communal strife. The newspapers were littered with defamations and condemnation between rival camps. Apart from the subjects concerning the Armenian readership, a wide range of issues were also discussed in the non-literary printed press, such as international politics, science, sport and other mundane subjects.

*Literary contents of the non-literary printed press*

Around 1923 and onwards the publication of literary materials became more frequent in the form of reviews, literary commentaries, literary news, articles and debates; newspapers published literary and artistic supplements. Such a case was the literary supplement of *Harach* newspaper, *Midk Yev Arvesd* [Thought and Art]. In order to demonstrate the amount of published literary critical material in the newspapers, I will bring the examples of the LDP and ARF party publications of 1925, namely the Cairo-based journals *Housaper* (ARF) and *Arev* (LDP), the Paris-based journals *Harach* (ARF) and *Abaka* (LDP), and the Boston-based journals *Hayrenik* (ARF) and *Baykar* (LDP). Within the specified timeframe around 39 pieces were published in *Housaper*, of which 34 made up the article of the little-known critic Onig Mekhitarian. The publication of literary pieces in the journals *Arev* (around nine pieces) and *Abaka* (around seven pieces) were scanty; there were around 19 pieces in the journal *Harach*. As for *Hayrenik* newspaper, around 36 pieces appeared, of which 17 were the two long articles of Mgrdich Barsamian. In *Baykar* 10 pieces out of 18 were a serialisation of Arshag Chobanian's article.

As for creative writing, poetry and to a lesser extent short stories had their fair share in the published materials. But the popular and demanded form of literature were the novels published in the newspapers in instalments, known as *terton*. It was a tactic designed to attract a readership. They included different genres, such as romances, detective novels and others. In this domain Yervant Odian<sup>116</sup> was a sought-after writer.

***The literary printed press***

Unlike the content of the non-literary printed press, as one may expect, the majority of the literary printed press consisted of materials connected with the sphere of creativity and intellectual activities. These materials could be categorised as traditional literary genres (poetry, prose, drama, etc.) and a second category comprising literary news, reviews, debates, translations, and articles on Armenian and non-Armenian literary subjects and figures.

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<sup>116</sup> Yervant Odian (1869-1926) was a Western Armenian satirist.

*Non-literary material of the literary press*

Apart from literary material the literary printed press also published a wide range of materials, such as articles of historical and social significance and memoirs. They even published articles connected to the scientific and sporting worlds, designed to attract the attention of young readers. This was the case of the Cairo-based periodical *Nor Sharzhoun*, which published the latest news of scientific achievements,<sup>117</sup> and more surprisingly pictures of wrestlers and the latest news of their successes.

*International literature and translations*

Articles on international literature and translations of foreign literatures made up a significant portion of printed literary materials. European literature was the main area of interest, in particular French, Italian, German, English, Russian, and to a lesser extent Spanish and Irish. To this list should be added American literature as part of the Western literary traditions. The works and articles on the output of many European and American writers were published in the printed press, including: William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Emile Verhaeren (1855-1916), Walt Whitman (1819-1892), John Keats (1795-1821), Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), George Byron (1788-1824), Emile Zola (1840-1902), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), Heinrich Mann (1871-1950), François Mauriac (1885-1970), Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919), Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), Knut Hamsun (1859-1952), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Romain Rolland (1866-1944), and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928).

Oriental literatures were flirted with, but limited to a few writers from very few countries and of these the lion share was reserved for Rabindranath Tagore. The Armenian printed press published extracts from his works and news about his tours around the world,<sup>118</sup> during

<sup>117</sup> See *Kednoughi Mon Blani Dagen* [Tunnel Under Mont Blanc], *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 32, 13<sup>th</sup> October, p. 504, 1923, Cairo.

<sup>118</sup> See *Rabintranat Tagor Agheksantrio Mech* [Rabindranath Tagore in Alexandria], Seza, *Housaper*, no. 209, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1926, Cairo; *Rabintranat Tagor Yekibdosi Mech* [Rabindranath Tagore in Egypt], *Arev*, no. 2371, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1926, Cairo; *Hntig Medz Panasdeghdz Rabintranat Tagor Sourapayoum* [The Great Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore in Sourapa], Ted, *Arev*, no. 2640, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1927, Cairo.

one of these he visited the Armenian isle of St Lazzaro in Venice.<sup>119</sup> The journal *Harach* even published an interview with him conducted by an Armenian journalist.<sup>120</sup> Omar Khayam<sup>121</sup> was another poet who captured the hearts of Armenians. Indian literature<sup>122</sup> was the only Asian literature which stirred some interest among the Armenian writers.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, during my research I stumbled upon an article on Japanese literature,<sup>124</sup> a rarity in the Armenian printed press of the 1920s.

Arabic literature was almost nonexistent in the Armenian printed press. Even the Armenian journals and periodicals published in the host Arab countries such as *Arev*, *Nor Sharzhoun* and *Housaper* in Egypt and *Aztag* in Lebanon did not show any interest. Knowledge of the Arabic language among the exiled Armenian writers and intellectuals was limited or nonexistent, which could account for this; however, in some Middle Eastern communities (for instance, Cairo) from the pre-Genocide period there was an established community with a contingent of intellectuals, who would have been able to engage in translations. For obvious reasons very few articles on Turkish literature were published.<sup>125</sup>

There were also a negligible number of articles dedicated to Western literatures, to philosophical and other topics connected to the intellectual sphere. Freud<sup>126</sup> was one of the names talked about in the Armenian printed press in 1920s. There were also a few surveys on foreign literatures: French,<sup>127</sup> German<sup>128</sup> and American<sup>129</sup>. Contemporary literary

<sup>119</sup> See *Rabintrana Tagor S. Ghazari Mech* [Rabindranath Tagore in St. Lazzaro], K. Kegharkouni, *Arev*, no. 1817, 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1925, Cairo.

<sup>120</sup> See *R. Tagor Yev Hayeré* [R. Tagore and the Armenians], *Harach*, no. 210, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1926, Paris.

<sup>121</sup> *Barsig Medz Horedes Pilisopa-Panasdeghdé (Omar Khayam)* [The Great Persian Pessimist Philosopher-poet (Omar Khayam)], Y. Frankian, *Housaper*, no. 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18, 1925, Cairo.

<sup>122</sup> For Armenian writers all literature written in India was "Indian literature". Unlike the people of India, Armenian writers did not distinguish that country's literatures based on language (i.e. "Hindi literature", "Urdu literature", etc.).

<sup>123</sup> See *Hntig Traman* [Indian Drama], Sh. N., *Pyunig*, no. 2, February, pp. 106-118, 1918, Boston; *Hntig Aghchigneré Yev Hntgagan Kraganoutyuné* [The Indian Maidens and the Indian Literature], Sh. Nartouni, *Harach*, no. 799, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1928, Paris.

<sup>124</sup> *Japontsi Tsndzouhineré Yev Japonagan Kraganoutyuné* [Japanese Geishas and Japanese Literature], Sh. Nartouni, *Harach*, no. 787 (26<sup>th</sup> October) and 788 (27<sup>th</sup> October), 1928, Paris.

<sup>125</sup> See *Arti Tourk Kraganoutyuné* [Modern Turkish Literature], *Housaper*, no. 189, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1928, Cairo.

<sup>126</sup> See *Freud Yev Ir Hokeverloudzagan Desoutyuné* [Freud and his Psychoanalytic Theory], Paylag Sanasar, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 18, 19, 20 and 21, 1923, Cairo; *Inch é Yerazé (Ech Mé Freudian Hokepanoutenen)* [What is a Dream (A Page from Freudian Psychology)], Yeghishé B. Chrakian, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3724 (31<sup>st</sup> July) and 3725 (1<sup>st</sup> August), 1924, Boston; *Zigmound Freud* [Sigmund Freud], G. Bedrosian, *Harach*, no. 125, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1926, Paris.

<sup>127</sup> See *Fransagan Arti Kraganoutyuné* [Modern French Literature], Ardashes Apeghian, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3573, 3574, 3578, 3579 and 3580, 1924, Boston; *Fransagan Kraganoutyuné Baderazmen Hedó* [French Literature After the War], S. Shahbaz, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 4058, 4059, 4060, 4061, 4062, 4063, 4064, 4065, 4066 and 4067, 1925, Boston; *Kragan Nor Sharzhouné Fransayi Mech* [The New Literary Movement in France], Mgrdich Barsamian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 12, 26<sup>th</sup> May, pp. 169-172, 1923, Cairo.



movements, such as surrealism<sup>130</sup> was also in the scope of the Armenian criticism. Reviews on foreign literary works were rare, one occasion being the belated review to T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land".<sup>131</sup>

### *Selection of the materials on foreign literatures*

Most of the materials on foreign literatures were in the form of literary critical articles written by Armenian diasporan writers, except in a few isolated cases. In these materials the translations of the literary texts composed a relatively small part of it. Individual taste, cultural background and political tendency were the three factors that played an important role in the selection of these materials. It is natural that individual taste was crucial in any kind of intellectual and artistic engagement. The inherited cultural tradition provided the framework of much cross-cultural activity; the cultural taste of the Western Armenians was cast in the European mould, especially the French. This tradition was formed in Constantinople, and in the case of the diaspora most of the writers were if not born then certainly culturally bred in, or from, Constantinople. The political factor also had an unavoidable share in the selection of literary materials based on political sympathies shown by foreign writers to the Armenian people and the Armenian Cause, especially in the light of the latest political upheavals. It was also based on the political beliefs, allegiances and affiliations of the Armenian writers or the given publications (see below) to a certain political current. I have never come across a selection pattern based on a professional approach for either the translations or the articles on foreign literatures. For instance, the planned and comprehensive presentation of different literatures was absent.

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<sup>128</sup> See *Kerman Kraganoutian Nor Hosankneré* [The New Currents of German Literature], Tavo Jivani, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 37, 17<sup>th</sup> November, pp. 574-575, 1923, Cairo.

<sup>129</sup> *Nor Kraganoutyuné Amerigayi Mech* [The New Literature in America], Ludwig Louison (translation), *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 2720, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1921, Boston.

<sup>130</sup> *Keriraganoutyun (Surréalisme)* [Surrealism], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 30 (14<sup>th</sup> January) and 31 (17<sup>th</sup> January), 1926, Paris; *Kerirabashdoutyuné* [Surrealism], Yet. Zahrejian, *Harach*, no. 435, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1927, Paris.

<sup>131</sup> See *The Wasteland-Khoban Hoghé*, Neshan Desdegyul, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3365, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1923, Boston. Also see *Chrasouyz Zanké* [The Submerged Bell], G. Hauptmann (reviewer K. Mekhitarian), *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 40-41, 16<sup>th</sup> December, pp. 623-626, 1923, Cairo.

### *Armenian materials*

The political divisions in the post-Genocide diaspora had a negative impact on literature. In the selection of literary materials it was well established that the printed press would promote certain writers according to their political affiliation. Arshag Chobanian's writings or articles about him would appear in the LDP official organs. This was the case of the journal *Baykar* in 1925, when the majority<sup>132</sup> of the literary materials were somehow connected to the name of Chobanian.<sup>133</sup> A similar pattern was repeated in some of the journals and periodicals with overt political affiliations.

Soviet Armenia was another battleground which conditioned the selection and the interpretation of the literary materials produced under its Communist regime. The printed press in the political orbit of the ARF party was full of literary critical articles lashing out at literature tailored to the Communist ideology.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand the pro-Soviet printed press published the creative works of Soviet Armenian writers and made critical evaluations on their works; some of them were panegyrics.<sup>135</sup> Other critics demonstrated moderate enthusiasm and they were measured in their praise and criticism.<sup>136</sup> Some of these articles were informative in nature and were a neutral presentation of the Soviet Armenian literary scene, without engaging in evaluation efforts.<sup>137</sup>

### *Non-Armenian materials*

The selection of foreign literary materials was partly due to the enormous reverence shown foreign writers who were sympathetic towards Armenians. This was the case in the

<sup>132</sup> This account is based on my observations.

<sup>133</sup> See the following publications in *Baykar* (Boston) in the issues of 1925; no. 13, 14, 15, 110, 136, 144, 145, 155, 212, 213, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 221, 222 and 223.

<sup>134</sup> See *Hay Polshvigneri Kraganoutyuné* ('Norki' Aritov) [The literature of Armenian Bolsheviks (On the Occasion of 'Nork')], V. Arsharounian, *Hayrenik*, no. 3418, 3419, 3420, 3421, 3422, 3423 and 3424, 1923, Boston; *Kraganoutyuné Hayasdani Mech* [Literature in Armenia], Sh. Nartouni, *Harach*, no. 581, 583, 587, 588, 589, 590 and 592, 1928, Paris; *Hayasdani 'Broledkroghneré'* ['The Proletarian Writers' of Armenia], *Housaper*, no. 287 (7<sup>th</sup> March), 288 (8<sup>th</sup> March) and 289 (9<sup>th</sup> March), 1928, Cairo.

<sup>135</sup> See *Shinararoutyuné Yev Hay Kraganoutyuné* [Reconstruction and Armenian Literature], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 53, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1926, Paris.

<sup>136</sup> See 'Norkin' *Artiv* [On the Occasion of 'Nork'], Arshag Chobanian, *Abaka*, no. 23, (5<sup>th</sup> May), 24 (12<sup>th</sup> May) and 25 (19<sup>th</sup> May), 1923 (3<sup>rd</sup> Year), Paris.

<sup>137</sup> See *Kragan Gyanké Khorhertayin Hayasdani Mech* [Literary Life in Soviet Armenia], Hrand, *Yerevan*, no. 8, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1925, Paris; *Kragan Hosankneri Artiv* [On the Occasion of Literary Movements], A. Garinian, *Yerevan*, no. 15, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1925, Paris.

post-Genocide period of some of the French writers. There were two motives behind this gesture: firstly, it was an expression of gratitude; secondly, it was designed to make Armenian readership aware of the existing positive image of Armenians in the outside world, thus weaving the narrative of the greatness of the Armenian “nation”, and this was against the backdrop of widespread post-Genocide despondency.

One of the writers most revered in Armenian literary and critical circles was Anatole France (1844-1924) – in the wake of his death scores of articles were dedicated to his work and different aspects of his life.<sup>138</sup> Another French writer and politician Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) as a friend of the Armenian people had his fair share of tributes in the Armenian printed press and on the occasion of his passing many obituaries and articles were published about him.<sup>139</sup> Henry Barbusse (1873-1935) was the icon of the Armenian political left, and as such he was promoted in the journal *Yerevan*.<sup>140</sup>

### *Readership of the printed press*

The readership<sup>141</sup> of the printed press in many cases was also divided along political lines and each orbit had its small but loyal readership. The literary content of the printed press was not the main interest of the readers, who most of the time were unaware of the ongoing literary and critical debates. As for the consumption of the literary publications it was far from being comforting since only a tiny minority showed interest in intellectual and spiritual spheres (this subject will be treated in Chapter Three).

<sup>138</sup> *Anatol Frans (Ir Kordzerou Panatrveloun Artiv)* [Anatole France (On the Occasion of the Demonisation of his Work)], H. Kh., *Hayrenik*, no. 3172, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1922, Boston; *Anatol Frans Marté Yev Ir Kordzé* [Anatole France the Man and his Work], Yer. Mesiaian, (reviewer Kr. Mekhalian), *Baykar*, no. 187 (11<sup>th</sup> August), 205 (1<sup>st</sup> September) and 206 (3<sup>rd</sup> September), 1923 (1<sup>st</sup> year), Boston; *Anatol Frans (Ir Mahvan Artiv)* [Anatole France (On the Occasion of his Death)], Arsen Yergat, *Housaper*, no. 91, 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1924, Cairo; *Anatol Frans (Mahvan Artiv)* [Anatole France (On the Occasion of his Death)], Hogop Oshagan, *Arev*, no. 1714, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1924, Cairo; *Anatol Frans Yev Nor Serounté* [Anatole France and the New Generation], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 11, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1925, Paris.

<sup>139</sup> See *Moris Bares, Navasart*, no. 4, December, pp. 119-120, 1923, Bucharest. *Maurice Bares*, K. M., *Nor Sharzhoum*, no. 42-43, 30<sup>th</sup> December, pp. 650-651, 1923, Cairo; *Moris Baresi Tasé* [The Lesson of Maurice Bares], A. Chobanian, *Abaka*, no. 9, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1924 (4<sup>th</sup> year), Paris.

<sup>140</sup> See *Henri Barbus Khorhertayin Hayasdan Hamar* [Henry Barbusse for Soviet Armenia], D. Zaven, *Yerevan*, no. 17, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1925, Paris; *Henri Barbus Fransagan Nerga Kraganoutian Masin* [Henry Barbusse on Contemporary French Literature], D. Zaven, *Yerevan*, no. 28, 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1926; *Henri Barbus Yev Khorhertayin Hayasdan* [Henry Barbusse and Soviet Armenia], *Yerevan*, no. 310, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1927; *Henri Barbus Yerevani Mech* [Henry Barbusse in Yerevan], *Yerevan*, no. 310, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1923; *Kragan Khoshor Temk Mé: H. Barbusi Badkamé Hay Mdavoraganoutian* [A Great Literary Figure : The Message of H. Barbusse to the Armenian Intellectuals], D. Zaven, *Yerevan*, no. 351, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1928.

<sup>141</sup> The subject of readership in the post-Genocide period remains one of the unexplored fields in Armenian studies.

## Editors, Writers and Critics

### *The educational background*

The people of letters who took the reins of intellectual life in the diaspora mainly consisted of Genocide survivors from Constantinople and those who were the recipients of Western Armenian cultural traditions, and a few of those who fled Communist rule in the Caucasus. They were the product of two different cultural climates. Of these, Tiflis was the centre of Eastern Armenian culture, which was under the spell of Russian and to a lesser extent German culture. Constantinople was the centre of Western Armenian culture, which was within the orbit of the French and to some degree of the Italian and other European cultures. The intellectual making and worldview of the elite was shaped by European cultures through educational networks ranging from Armenian secondary schools to higher education institutions in France, Russia and Germany. This was the case of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century intellectuals who brought about the cultural revival in both cultural centres. For our purposes I will concentrate on the breeding ground of the Western Armenian intellectuals, namely the educational institutions in Constantinople at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Schools in Constantinople*

Any social change occurs first and foremost in the form of ideas, forged in different educational and cultural institutions. Schools were considered to be at the forefront of any change. As an immediate result of the reforms of Sultan Selim III in 1789, a considerable number of parochial schools clustered in Constantinople. This flagship task was headed by *amira* Shnorhk Mgrdich. In 1832 the Bezjian School was founded, followed by the foundation of the acclaimed Sgyudari Jemaran [College of Sgyudar] by *amira* Garabed Balian in 1838. With its high educational standards it soon became one of the most influential educational institutions in the community. A handful of intellectuals were among the graduates of this college. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there were 40 schools and two colleges in Constantinople, with around 5000 students. The educational movement had reached its peak in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the establishment of two colleges: the

prominent intellectual Reteos Berberian (see Appendix) founded Berberian Varzharan [Berberian School] in 1876; and the efforts of Patriarch Nerses Varzhabedian saw the foundation of Getronagan Varzharan [Central School] in 1886. The first principal of Getronagan Varzharan was Minas Cheraz (1886-1889) (see Appendix). Both colleges, which offered to their students both scientific and literary branches of study, gained pre-eminence through their high educational standards; the curriculum included the study of languages in Armenian, French, English, Turkish and Arabic and in the humanities, history, literature, philosophy, pedagogy and religion were offered. At the end of their secondary education graduates would be able to further their higher education in the European universities.

These colleges became the bastion of Western Armenian language and literature and forged the Western Armenian identity of at least two generations. Among the graduates of Berberian Varzharan were Roupen Sevag and Vahan Tekeyian. The teaching staff of Getronagan Varzharan included the elite of the time, among them Dzerents, Yeghia Demirjibashian, Reteos Berberian, Hagop Baronian, Hrant Asadour, Diran Chrakian (pseudonym Indra), Levon Shant, Vahan Tekeyian, Hagop Oshagan, Gosdan Zarian, Zabel Asadour (see Appendix) and Gomidas. Among the graduates of Getronagan Varzharan were acclaimed writers and literary critics, namely Arshag Chobanian, Hagop Sirouni, Misak Medzarents, Vahan Tekeyian, Hagop Mntsourian and Yeroukhan. The cultural impact of these two educational institutions was beyond the confinement of Constantinople. Many of the first generation of writers in the diaspora were the cultural product of these institutions and they carried the knowledge, spirit and traditions of these colleges to the diaspora. Among these people of letters were Shahan Shahnour, Zareh Vorpouni (Berberian), Kourken Mkhitarian, Garo Sasouni, Hrach Zartarian and Nigoghos Sarafian (Getronagan).

### *Provincial schools*

The avidity of enlightenment was also diffused to the Armenian provinces of Ottoman Turkey. In densely populated Armenian towns and cities, new schools and colleges were opened, such as Sanasarian Varzharan [Sanasarian School] in 1881 in Garin (which moved to Sepasdia in 1912) and Smpadian Varzharan [Smpadian School] in Kharpert in 1872. Some of the literary critics and writers of the diaspora, such as Paylag Sanasar, Mgrdich Barsamian and Hrach Zartarian were among the graduates of Sanasarian Varzharan.

*Schools in the pre-Genocide diaspora*

At the forefront of the educational activities in the pre-Genocide period were the Mkhitarist fathers.<sup>142</sup> Mkhitar Sepasdatsi began his cultural activities by founding two schools, namely the one in Garmir Vank [Red Monastery] in Garin and one in Constantinople. In the later period the Mkhitarist fathers opened scores of schools, six in Constantinople, and in mainland Armenia one in Moush in 1892, in Kharpert in 1912, Merdin in 1911, to name just a few. The proliferation of Armenian communities across Europe gave rise to a number of educational institutions. Mourad Raphayelian Varzharan [Mourad Raphayelian School] was founded in Venice in 1836. It had a six-year educational programme and from 1879 it had a secondary school. It was a boarding school with 120 students of which 45 students would have free education. A number of renowned Mkhitarist scholars taught in Mourad Rafayelian, such as Ghevont Alishan, V. Hatsouni, V. Avkerian and M. Janashian. The alumni included many of the refined artists and scholars of the time, such as the acclaimed poet Taniel Varouzhan, the writer and cultural activist Tomas Terzian, the outstanding actor Vahram Papazian and the talented painter Edgar Shahin. Mkhitarist fathers also established Samvel Mouradian Varzharan in Sèvre, and Mouradian Varzharan in Padua.

*Editors*

There was a sense of crisis among Armenian intellectuals in the immediate aftermath of the Genocide. It took some time for the elite in the diaspora to grasp the enormity of the loss, which was on four levels: a) political, by the loss of homeland; b) human loss, more than a million Armenians perished, including the majority of the intellectuals; c) the loss of cultural products of aesthetic value, both localised and mobile; d) the loss of cultural habitat, vital for the construction of Armenian identity. Although the recuperation process proved to be hard and slow, a handful of survivors in the literary world responded to the task of cultural reconstruction in the diaspora.

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<sup>142</sup> On the history of Armenian education one might consult the following sources: "History of Education in Armenia", Kevork Sarafian, Pasadena, CA: PCC Press, 1978 (1930); "Knowledge, Nation, and the Curriculum: Ottoman Armenian Education (1853-1915)", Pamela Young, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: PhD dissertation, 2001.

Since the printed press was the first means of written expression in the first decade of the post-Genocide diaspora, the editors of newspapers and journals determined the priorities and set the agenda of the reconstruction efforts. Prior to their journalistic activities in the diaspora most of the editors had had productive careers in the same domain in the urban Armenian cultural centres; some of them had also been involved in literary activities.

Having combined vocations was a common practice in the Armenian journalistic tradition: writers were often journalists and educators. The role of the people of letters was perceived to be multivocational, this owing to many factors: since the pre-literate age it was deep-rooted in the popular perception that people who had the knowledge of books could master a variety of skills. In this sense the perception of a vocation called “journalism” in the modern sense was not yet shaped. Another reason was the shortage of human resources in the cultural domain, which made the vocation of intellectual wide open – almost to anyone who had a sufficient level of education. There were not stringent criteria in the selection process for the contributors of the printed press. From the writers’ point of view, contributing to the printed press was a matter of moral duty and material convenience. Because of lack of human resources often writers were obliged to fill the intellectual gaps in the printed media, especially when it came to shaping public opinion. Since literature was not a reliable source of income, writers often had to rely on other avenues to fund themselves. In the case of the writers with political affiliations, they were willingly or unwillingly absorbed in the activities of their party’s media outlets.

The traditions of journalistic practice and intellectual erudition of the journalists and people of letters in Constantinople and Smyrna not only became an intellectual asset but also set standards for the practice of journalism in the post-Genocide diaspora. As for their journalistic or literary production in the pre-Genocide period, unfortunately I have no sufficient materials at my disposal in order to make any judgments. Another point worth noting was the fact that personal relationships forged in Constantinople at times conditioned the dynamics of the journalistic profession outside: friendships and alliances forged on the one hand were balanced by tensions born of individual differences, professional rivalries and sordid grudges (something for which Constantinople Armenians were famous) and this dynamic played an important role in the journalistic culture of the diaspora. The most acclaimed editors were Vahan Tekeyian, Roupen Tarpinian, Arshag Chobanian (for more

about Chobanian, see below), Shavarsh Misakian, Vahan Navasartian, Hagop Sirouni, Shahan Natali, Yeghia Choubar (see Appendix).<sup>143</sup>

### *Writers and Critics*

Few writers escaped the Genocide: Zabel Yesayian<sup>144</sup> fled to Bulgaria; Hagop Oshagan went into hiding from Turkish police then fled to Bulgaria in the uniform of a German army officer; Levon Shant, Gosdan Zarian and Vahan Tekeyian by a stroke of luck were abroad during the events of 1915. In the Armenian diaspora the contribution of the surviving writers was instrumental; they shaped the literary traditions and as critics set the stringent literary critical standards, as in the case of Hagop Oshagan. They did this not only out of a sense of duty to their vocation but also out of a sense of responsibility to their murdered brethren to fulfil their uncompleted literary mission – this was a unique response to the catastrophe. The critics and the writers in question were Hagop Oshagan, Zabel Yesayian, Levon Shant, Garo Sasouni, Nshan Desdegyul, Kourken Mkhitarian, although there were also others (see Appendix).

### *“Deserters”*

Not all the Constantinople writers heeded the rallying call of revival in the post-Genocide diaspora; some preferred to stay on the sidelines, away from the tumultuous Armenian milieu and in some instances inter-communal strife. The periodical *Navasart* draws the picture of the literary arena by engaging itself in a more upfront assessment. It names the writers who demonstrated a lack of creative yearning. According to the periodical there were a few “deserters”<sup>145</sup> who completely abandoned literature such as Levon Pashalian<sup>146</sup> and Dikran

<sup>143</sup> It must be conceded, however, that there were other editors in addition to these few.

<sup>144</sup> For Zabel Yesayian's works see *Zabel Yesayian, Gyanké Yev Kordzé* [Zabel Yesayian: Her Life and Work], S. Arzoumanian, Yerevan, 1964; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. VI, pp. 245-348, Beirut, 1968; “A History of Armenian Women's Writing: 1880-1922”, Victoria Rowe, London: Cambridge Scholars Press Ltd., 2003.

<sup>145</sup> See *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, [The Ivory Towers], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 8, July, p.225, Bucharest, 1924.

<sup>146</sup> On Levon Pashalian see *Levon Pashalian*, S. Manougian, Yerevan, 1969; *Levon Pashalian*, H. Parikian, Aleppo, 1970; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 80-129, Jerusalem, 1952 (?) (On the title page the date mentioned 1952, but in Bardakjian's “Reference Guide to .....” it is given as 1962, which fits in the chronological pattern of the publication; in this thesis I will mention both dates).



Gamsaragan;<sup>147</sup> other writers, such as Archbishop Yeghishé Tourian,<sup>148</sup> Zabel Asadour<sup>149</sup> and Hrant Asadour<sup>150</sup> were on the fringes of literature (for the mentioned writers see Appendix), in a sort of “semi-abandoned” creative existence.<sup>151</sup>

A handful of writers had to channel their efforts and energy away from creative work. This was the case of Arshag Chobanian,<sup>152</sup> an active member of the LDP party who in the post-Genocide diaspora was engaged more in political and social activities than in translation,<sup>153</sup> literary and critical work. He was also involved in the political bickering (in the real sense of the word) in diaspora, becoming the mouthpiece of Soviet Armenia. His pen was in the service of his political squabbles, especially when as editor of the newspaper *Abaka* the official organ of the LDP. Hagop Oshagan makes an accurate observation on the nature of his intellectual character, which was more “public and editorial and therefore alien to art”.<sup>154</sup> At the outset his literary critical career was the most important aspect of Chobanian’s intellectual activity. Three essays dedicated to the medieval poet Krikor Naregatsi (1895), and romantic poets Mgrdich Beshigtashlian (1907) and Bedros Tourian (1892) made his reputation as an erudite literary critic. After these works he did not produce any major critical treatise and over time his work in non-artistic areas took its toll with the result that he lost the critical agility that he once had.

<sup>147</sup> On Dikran Gamsaragan see *Dikran Gamsaragan, Gyanké Yev Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné* [Dikran Gamsaragan, the Life and Works], H. Markarian, Yerevan, 1964; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 250-304, Jerusalem, 1952 (?) (1962).

<sup>148</sup> On Archbishop Yeghishé Tourian see *Panasdeghdzé Tourian Srpazani Mech* [The Poet within Archbishop Tourian], A. Chobanian, *Anahid*, no. 5, pp. 1-5, Paris, 1930; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. VI, pp. 39-183, Beirut, 1968.

<sup>149</sup> On Zabel Asadour see *Zabel (Sibil) Asadour*, H. Mark, Constantinople, 1949; *Sibil-Zabel Asadour*, A. Minasian, Yerevan, 1980; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 415-458, Jerusalem, 1952 (?) (1962).

<sup>150</sup> About Hrant Asadour see *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 459-477, Jerusalem, 1952 (?) (1962).

<sup>151</sup> All the names of the writers thereof are cited from the periodical *Navasart*. See *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, loc. cit., p. 225.

<sup>152</sup> For the evaluation of Chobanian’s literary and critical productions see *Arshag Chobanian*, T. Aleksanian, Athens, 1939; *Arshag Chobanian*, G. Tallakian, Yerevan, 1987; *Arshag Chobanian: Gensakragan Kdzer* [Arshag Chobanian: Biographical Notes], H. Habeshian, Paris, 1924; *Arshag Chobaniané Spyurkahay Kraganoutian Knnatad* [Arshag Chobanian, Critic of Diasporan Armenian Literature], Zh. Kalantarian, *Panaper Yerevani Hamalsarani*, vol. 3, pp. 26-36, Yerevan, 1989; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 305-414, Jerusalem, 1952 (?) (1962); “Archag Tchobanian et le Mouvement Arménophile en France”, E. Khayadjian, Marseilles (?), 1986.

<sup>153</sup> Chobanian’s significant contribution was in introducing Armenian poetry to circles unfamiliar with the Armenian cultural heritage. He masterfully rendered the masterpieces of Armenian poetry and folkloric poems into French, which came to light as *Chants Populaires Arméniens* (1903), *Trouvères et Troubadours Arméniens* (1906) and *La Roseaie d’Arménie* (volume 1 in 1918, volume 2 in 1923 and volume 3 in 1929).

<sup>154</sup> See *Mayrinerou Shoukin Dag* [Under the Shade of Cedars], Boghos Snabian (edit.), (Literary interview with Hagop Oshagan), interviewed by Peniamin Tashian. Beirut: Centenary Publication, no. 2, p. 53, 1983.

There were a large number of writers and intellectuals who struggled to earn their living. They were forced to work in non-vocational occupations, which ranged from teaching in schools to the meanest jobs and in these cases creative production was almost a luxury possible only in their free time.

### **The New Generation**

The first generation of diasporan writers and critics entered the scene of Armenian literature in the early 1920s. There was a sense of cultural impoverishment within literary circles. But the fact is there was an increase in the level of activity in the sphere of culture in general and literature in particular in the form of the printed press and other literary productions. The problem was the bridge linking the two generations of the older and the new writers was very loose. Therefore, new intellectual discourses (characteristic of any transition from one generation to the next) with their own tensions, alongside interactions at a social level, which would shape the intellectual making of the new generation, did not take place. With their lives brutally ended, the victims among the intellectuals, many in their prime of creativity, were denied the opportunity for complete creative development.

The new generation of writers and artists had to strive not only to cope with their individual losses, but also to bridge the gap between these two generations both emotionally and intellectually, and this was a matter of urgency.<sup>155</sup> They had to fill the gap so that they could secure the continuity of their literary traditions; they had to reconstruct the missing parts in order to start their journey of intellectual exploration. Their creative consciousness was shaped from the perspective of survival and fell under the shadow of these earlier victim writers. They had a mixed attitude of reverence and to some extent criticism. The catastrophic events with all their effects and the consequent hardship in earning their bread had embittered them against the older generation as well as the perpetrators of the Genocide. The new generation found itself facing the social, cultural and political challenges of the new environments. Displacement alienated them and made readjustment very difficult. The consequence of the Genocide was not only the fact that Armenians were uprooted from their cultural habitat, namely the homeland, but also that the Armenian creative potentiality was halted and the rational faculty numbed. On a personal level also this generation was a victim of the Genocide: during the deportations and the massacres they lost their beloved ones, such

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<sup>155</sup> See *Yergou Khosk* [Brief Word], *Navasart*, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> January, pp. 62-63, New York, 1922.

as Vazken Shoushanian, Hamasdegh, Hrach Zartarian (see Appendix) and others. In order to survive they had to rely on their meagre earnings from unappealing jobs, sometimes even working in factories, and consequently literature was a luxury which they only could produce after daily hardship. The main figures of the new generation of writers and critics except the above-mentioned names were Nigoghos Sarafian, Hrand Palouyian and Tashian Peniamin (see Appendix).

### **Aesthetic Framework**

#### *Constantinople generation*

Constantinople writers were nourished by the French philosophers and aesthetes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of these, the pre-eminent aesthete and philosopher Hippolyte Taine had a great impact on Armenian literary criticism.

He was born in France in 1828. At the age of 11, he received a private elementary education by a priest and in 1841 he furthered his education at a private school in Paris, where in 1848 he was accepted at the Ecole Normale. In 1853 he obtained his doctorate in literature. In Paris he lectured in art history and aesthetics at Ecole des Beaux-Art in 1864. By the invitation of Oxford University he gave a series of lectures about Racine and Corneille in 1871. In 1878 he was elected a member of the French Academy. He died in 1893. His best-known works are “Essai sur les Fables de la Fontaine” (1853), “Les Philosophes Classiques du XIX Siècle en France” (1857), and “Philosophie de l’Art” (1865).

In the introduction of his most celebrated work, the trilogy “Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise”<sup>156</sup> (1864), Taine enunciated the three elements of his aesthetics, which were *race*, *milieu*, and *moment*. According to him these elements conditioned the production of an artwork. This was the critical framework within which he evaluated artistic works in general and literary works in particular.

Firstly, according to Taine the racial element was an important factor in the creation of an artwork. There were some racial and family merits that an artist would inherit, which would

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<sup>156</sup> See *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*, Hippolyte Taine, vol. I, Librairie de L. Hachette, Paris, 1863.

be exposed in a work of art. Therefore, each work of art had its national character which would differ from other works of art created by artists of different nationalities.

Secondly, if the racial element was an internal quality then the external element (*milieu*) was also crucial, which comprised two sub-factors, namely physical and socio-political conditions. The former was connected to the physical environment, such as mountains, rivers, nature, and especially the climate. The latter were the social and political dynamics of the given time within which a work of art was created. These elements would intervene during the creative process.

Thirdly, the *moment* as one would surmise would be the particular time of the creation of an artwork. For Taine, however, it also had another aspect: *moment* is a chain of inherently connected epochs in history, the previous always shaping the next, and therefore it was the baggage of historical experience.<sup>157</sup>

Taine's aesthetic tenets sparked heated debates, which I have chosen not to touch upon, since this is out of the scope of my thesis. One point raised against his theory by his critics in France was also echoed in Armenian literary criticism, namely the lack of intervention of individuality in the creative process of works of art. One of the Armenian critics who made this observation was Arshag Chobanian.<sup>158</sup> He argued that the role of the writer is more than being a mere vehicle for the exposition of his/her environment and hereditary merits. There was also an individual element in the creation of works of art.

However, Armenian literary critics had internalised the aesthetic principles of Taine and they often employed some aspects of them in the evaluation of literary works.

From the 1880s onwards Taine became a household name in Western Armenian critical circles and many articles were dedicated to his aesthetic views. H. Oshagan and Arshag Chobanian were among the scores of critics who were influenced by his critical thought.

### *New generation*

Although the aesthetic appeal of Taine gradually faded in the following decades, his ideas were to some extent bequeathed to some critics in the diaspora, such as Kourken Mekhitarian and Peniamin Tashian, the two acolytes of Hagop Oshagan. In the efforts to reconstruct

<sup>157</sup> See *Hippolyte Taine*, Leo Weinstein, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., pp. 83-84, 1972.

<sup>158</sup> For a comprehensive account of the impact of the aesthetics of Taine on Armenian critical thought see *Hay Kraganakidoutian Badmoutyun* [The History of Armenian Literary Criticism], Zh. A. Kalantarian, Yerevan: Publication of State University of Yerevan, pp. 331-392, 1986.

Armenian life in the post-Genocide diaspora, and in this context in the discourses related to the role of literature, some of Taine's ideas still had resonance. There were no direct references by the diasporan critics to Taine's principles, as was the case in the criticism by the writers from Constantinople. However, the underlying premises of their critical discourses in one way or another were influenced by the three components of Taine's aesthetics.

Those arguments may be identified as follows: a) literature was an exposition of "ethnic" values and as such each Armenian writer was expected to contribute to a "racially" based aesthetics; b) the environment (in this case the lost homeland) was important in the creation of "ethnic" literature;<sup>159</sup> c) the third element, the *moment* regarded as an accumulation of tradition, was the basis of the argument put forward by the diasporan critics, according to which the present epoch is an important part of a whole continual sequence of creativity. Armenians as inheritors of past values have the duty not only to bequeath them to the next generation but also to contribute to its flourishing, thus becoming a bridge between past and present as a guarantee of the continuity of Armenian literature.

### *Other literary and artistic movements*

As for the literary movements of the time, the new generation of Armenian writers in diaspora showed apathy towards them. This is not to say that they were uninformed about the latest developments in the artistic world. It was merely intellectual disengagement with causes rooted in their personal life. There was dissimilarity between their unique tragic collective experience and the existing literary movements and schools of thought.

This was the case in the response of diasporan writers towards Surrealism, initiated by André Breton in 1924. The whole of Surrealist aesthetics was based on an unconscious state of mind, which must be exempt from any kind of intervention of logic and reason. This was totally incompatible with the experience of Armenian writers. They were haunted by their tragic experience which meant that the intervention of consciousness in the creative process was constant and their literature was the manifestation of the result of that experience.

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<sup>159</sup> In other words *milieu* was a crucial component for the emotional and intellectual making of the diasporan writers.

### *Minor Writers*

The absence in diaspora of literary figures of a high calibre was often filled with mediocre people, in both the fields of literature and criticism. A quick glance at the quality of some of the publications in the press<sup>160</sup> in the 1920s draws a bleak picture and one gets a sense that on the desolate intellectual horizon people with questionable intellectual merits were set free to roam in the literary wasteland.

Kourken Mkhitarian describes the literary scene as total “anarchy” and “chaos”.<sup>161</sup> Reviewing a book of poetry called *Varti Gogoner* [Rosebuds] of the insignificant young poet Barkev Ohan from the United States, he lambasts the poet for his extremely inartistic poems. Even the fact that he was a survivor and had lost his mother in a deportation march in the desert does not spare him the wrath of the reviewer.

*Navasart* accuses the press of giving a platform to such “clowns”,<sup>162</sup> and brings the example of one Kasbar Nemtsé, a “rising star” in the intellectual circles in Constantinople, formerly a buffoon who in the absence of heavyweight intellectuals turned into a pretentious self-styled intellectual, making deplorable literary translations and writing mediocre articles on various subjects. In every diasporan community there were many Kasbar Nemtsés and Barkev Ohans.

In another editorial *Navasart* complains about the approach to literature of some of the intellectuals and writers. Its remark was based on the feedback to *Navasart* itself on its own publication. The editor refers to some of the letters received by the editor in which some intellectuals suggested that the periodical should cover scientific and sports subjects and issues of public interest in order to enhance public knowledge. The editor Hagop Sirouni woefully observes that “it is unfortunate that up to now we do not have an understanding of literature”.<sup>163</sup>

This kind of approach towards literature had its explanations: in some quarters of the mediocre and conservative writers there was a utilitarian approach towards literature – they

<sup>160</sup> I suggest that anyone with an interest in this matter take a look at *Hayrenik* (monthly) for the relevant years, and for critical material to take a look at the newspapers.

<sup>161</sup> See *Kragan Anishkhanoutyun* [Literary Anarchy], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 36, 10<sup>th</sup> November, p. 563, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>162</sup> See *Yerp Soungeré Gé Mnán* [When Mushrooms Remain], *Navasart*, no. 6, November, p.163, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>163</sup> See *Khouteroun Yev Mshoushin Mech* [Through the Stumbling Blocks and the Fog], editorial, *Navasart*, no.4, December, p. 98, Bucharest, 1923.

viewed it as an edifying factor for the masses. In the Armenian Realist tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literature was viewed as a tool for promulgating the socio-political agenda. The boundary between literature and the commentaries on social and political issues was porous; literature was often confused with social commentary, and vice versa.

Except for the contribution of some of the Constantinople literary critics such as Hagop Sirouni, Hagop Oshagan, and Kourken Mkhitarian, literary criticism was another area of intellectual activity which suffered the same fate of aesthetic vandalism as that of literature. Oshagan complains about one of the “unnatural aspects” of Armenian literature of the diaspora, which was the “abundance of the people called critics”.<sup>164</sup> The majority of Armenian newspapers and the periodical press did not have the financial means to keep professional staff in the modern sense, and editors were under constant pressure to fill the pages of their journals. Often they were dependent on voluntary contributions, which pushed the editors to adopt a more lenient attitude and to loosen the selective criteria for the writing. This was relevant for both the literary and non-literary materials. Very few publications managed to avoid compromising their aesthetic principles in the face of financial difficulties.

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<sup>164</sup> Boghos Snabian (edit.), *Mayrinerou Shoukin Dag*, op. cit., p. 30.

## Chapter Three

### The Formation of Diasporan Literature

#### Awareness of the seriousness of the situation

After the Genocide there was a sense of bewilderment and desperation; many editorials in literary journals captured that mood in their prefaces.<sup>165</sup> The question of the survival of Armenians was raised. The main concern was the physical existence of the Armenians; then cultural identity was faced with great challenges. The gravity of the situation was acutely realised, but the cumbersome task of recovery and the lack of resources made confusion and panic the order of the day.

After the “storm”<sup>166</sup> which uprooted Armenians from their homeland in their hundreds of thousands, the priority of the refugees was their physical survival. During the war any kind of cultural activity was beyond the immediate needs of the hunger- and disease-stricken population. Immediately after the Armistice, against all odds Armenians started to piece together their shattered life and tried to readjust to their new state of existence. Naturally, emotional wellbeing was at the bottom of their list of priorities. Kourken Mkhitarian observes that the daily problems and the anxieties were so immense that they did not leave any space for interest in other forms of “intangible existence” or “spirituality”<sup>167</sup>, by which he meant artistic activities.

From the first half of the 1920s the imperative of the “spiritual” need as a means of solace for the grief-stricken masses began to take shape especially in the form of commentaries on literary issues and literary critical texts. After securing their physical

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<sup>165</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé* [Our Aim], editorial, *Nor Sharzhoun* [New Movement], editorial, no. 1, 10<sup>th</sup> March, p. 1; *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné* [Our New Literature], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 1, 10<sup>th</sup> March, p. 6, Cairo, 1923

<sup>166</sup> The tragic events were often metaphorically referred to as a “storm”. See *Mer Nbadagé*, *Nor Sharzhoun*, loc. cit; *Zhoghovourté Tebi Kraganoutyun Bedk é Danil* [The People Should be Brought to the Literature], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 32, 13<sup>th</sup> October, p. 497, Cairo, 1923; *Yerp Soungeré Gé Mnán*, loc. cit., p. 163.

<sup>167</sup> See *Hay Kraganoutyuné Yev Hasaragoutyuné* [Armenian Literature and Society], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 31, 6<sup>th</sup> October, p. 482. Cairo, 1923.



existence, the refugees had other pressing issues, such as the reconstruction of other aspects of Armenian communal life. This strenuous task required enormous effort. Unlike other nations recovering from the devastation of World War I, the Armenians required a double effort, since they had to come to terms not only with the consequences of the war but also of the hideous crime of the Genocide of 1915. Therefore what urgently needed to be pursued was a “rescue policy”<sup>168</sup> both to maintain the physical existence of Armenians and also the continuation of their intellectual and moral values, which were the only guarantee of its survival.<sup>169</sup> Another unsettling voice raised the alarm that “the dispersion, moral and intellectual drainage is a second death”<sup>170</sup> after the physical death. The writer of the editorial of *Nor Havadk*<sup>171</sup> clearly articulated the dangers that expelled masses can face away from their homeland.

One of the three death sentences, namely the dispersion, had already been carried out, and the efforts had to be channelled towards the maintenance and activation of the intellectual and moral faculties of Armenians, as these were the vital tools of survival. Therefore, the very existence of the Armenian people was contingent upon the simultaneous activities of these two forces, these being the only remaining values upon which the foundation of the “nation” could be laid. The reconstruction of the “spiritual” edifice of the dejected masses was of paramount importance; this was the only way to restore their pride and the self confidence, which would qualify them as a civilised “nation”. For a “nation” lacking a political and military means of determining its fate this was the only possible avenue to follow.

This approach of embracing human values in a time of grave crisis had deep historical roots. It was a pattern repeated throughout Armenian history with the classic example dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Persians and the Romans partitioned Armenia into two separate states and annexed these to their own territories. The existence of the Armenian people was in danger. In the absence of military might for the survival of the “nation” the response of the Armenian political and religious elite was cultural. They had the ingenious idea to devise an Armenian alphabet, and they commissioned Mesrob Mashdots for the task. He succeeded in his task (404-406), and as a result of his success a flurry of feverish cultural

<sup>168</sup> *Yergou Aracharg* [Two Proposals], editorial, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 20, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, p. 298, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid; also see Kourken Mkhitarian, *Zhoghvourté Tebi Kraganoutyün Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit., pp. 497-498.

<sup>170</sup> See *Nor Havadké* [The New Faith], editorial, *Nor Havadk* [New Faith], no. 1, June, Marseille, 1924. It was beyond my means to identify the number of the page, but it most probably was the first page.

<sup>171</sup> The publishers were Bedros Zaroyian and Zareh Vorpouni.

activities was begun. Scores of schools sprang up to disseminate the new alphabet and education, and scholarship became the new fighting ground for an embattled “nation”. The greatest achievement was the translation of the Bible, by doing so they re-Christianised Armenian people by providing them with the necessary means to connect to God through their language. The main aim for creating the alphabet was to disseminate the Christian faith. The by-product of these activities was the formation of a unique Armenian Christian identity.<sup>172</sup> In addition to the Bible, philosophical and theological texts were rendered into Armenian, which ushered in one of the most productive periods of Armenian literature.

If significant political events and the ensuing upheavals could be the catalyst of great changes in the cultural domain as had been the case in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, then the conclusion reached by some people of letters in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was that after the latest catastrophic events the conditions would be conducive for an another culturally innovative venture. At the outset of the literary endeavours, however, this idea had sparse currency.

In an article Mgrdich Barsamian (see Appendix) states that literary history shows clearly that after “important social upheavals”<sup>173</sup> people appraise the existing values and strive to find a “new direction, new revelation and new mystery”.<sup>174</sup> The same kind of view emerges in the opening editorial of the first issue of the literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoun*. It reiterates that “catastrophes of great significance are ensued by huge reconstructions, large movements and new tendencies”.<sup>175</sup> Although the writer does not flesh out his statements, the mentioned “reconstruction” concerns the cultural and intellectual domain. These are the basis of the survival of Armenians because, he continues, “light is created from chaos”<sup>176</sup> and the logical continuation of this line of thought is that the Armenian people must follow this illuminating path of “remedy”<sup>177</sup> which leads to the “Rebirth”<sup>178</sup> of the “nation”. The creation of “light” refers to the biblical tale of Creation, when God created light in the planet’s chaotic state. This myth was interpreted to mean that the political upheavals would bring about essential changes, thus leading Armenians into a new era. The “Rebirth” is a central idea in

<sup>172</sup> “Die Bekehrung Transkaukasiens: Eine Historiographie Mit Doppeltem Boden”, Jean Pierre Mahé, pp. 107-124, in Werner Seibt (ed.), “Die Christianisierung Des Kaukasus. The Christianization of Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia and Albania). Referate Des Internationalen Symposions (Wien 9. bis 12. Dezember, 1999), (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission Für Byzantinistik IX; Vienna, 2002).

<sup>173</sup> See *Heghashrchoun Yev Noreré* [Upheaval and the New Writers], Megerdich Barsamian. *Adroushan* [Pagan Temple], no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 8, Izmir, 1919.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> *Mer Nbadagé, Nor Sharzhoun*, loc. cit. p. 1.

<sup>176</sup> It refers to the biblical story of Genesis. See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit. p. 6.

<sup>177</sup> *Mer Nbadagé, Nor Sharzhoun*, loc. cit. p.1.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

the rhetoric of discourses in the immediate post-Genocide period. As well as physical survival it also indicates the emotional, intellectual and cultural development of Armenians. These were vital ingredients which would usher in a new era. In this sense Armenian history was a chain of “Rebirths”, during which the Armenian identity was forged.

Evidently, the high expectations and spirit of optimism nurtured hopes for the reconstruction of the Armenian way of life in diaspora and for the first time heartened the intellectuals. The vision of a bright future was the only thing left to hope for, and that was enough to strengthen the determination to overcome the collective psychological misery, social and cultural stagnation, and to find a quick exit from the undesirable situation. This show of resolve was encapsulated in the writings of many writers. The tone of the rhetoric was one of optimism. They heralded the “end of the crucifixion” and the beginning of “literary resurrection”.<sup>179</sup> A voice from Boston resolutely refused to yield to despair and vows to do “whatever is necessary for the development and the ennoblement of our people”.<sup>180</sup> There were desperate efforts “to dissipate the nightmare and the black thoughts of painful years”.<sup>181</sup>

The will and enthusiasm for the recovery from the calamitous collective experience did not involve all segments of Armenian society in dispersion. As we discussed (see Chapter Two), some people of letters were disengaged from literary activities; they considered it untimely and an inappropriate diversion. The traumatic experience had swept the rational and emotional spheres and made life unbearably hard to live. Therefore, for some writers the conditions were not conducive to literary and artistic activity.<sup>182</sup> It was this kind of mindset which was taking shape in the wake of the catastrophe. On the opposite side of this argument, many intellectuals and writers considered literature to be at the core of the Armenians’ efforts towards cultural and emotional recovery. At this crucial juncture of Armenian history, when the very existence of the Armenian people was at stake, the last thing that a writer could do was to abandon the trenches under flimsy pretexts. For them this was a defeatist approach and such an attitude could have serious repercussions.

<sup>179</sup> Both events refer to Christ’s death and his remerging among the living ones. *Vaghortaynin* [Towards the Morrow], editorial, *Adroushan*, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 1, Izmir, 1919.

<sup>180</sup> *Pyunigi Nor Shrchané* [The New Cycle of Pyunig], editorial, *Pyunig*, no. 6-7, June-July, p. 1090, Boston, 1919.

<sup>181</sup> “*Olimbosi*” *Nbadagé* [The Aim of “Olimbos”], editorial, *Olimbos*, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> October, p. 8, Salonica, 1926.

<sup>182</sup> I have not come across printed material that expresses these arguments. These views, I assume, were expressed orally and in correspondences between individuals. In an editorial in the periodical *Navasart* the writer Hagop Sirouni indicates that he had received this kind of letter and complains that “there is a generation of deserters” among the writers. See *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, loc. cit., p. 225.

As we see, the self-perception of the intellectuals of their role in society was moralistic as much as pragmatic. For them the intellectual or the writer had to be the consciousness and the conscience of the people. Especially, in a situation like that in which Armenians found themselves, the people of letters had to be the guiding light through this dark tunnel. They were in front of a *fait accompli* – the disaster had stricken and now it was up to them to put things back together. In order to go forward they had to reconstruct the Armenian way of life; therefore they had to work, regardless of their mental and psychological state.

Kourken Mkhitarian and Levon Shant aver that literature has always been an inherent part of the basic chain of human needs, in whatever circumstances. Human beings, just as they take care of their physical needs, must in the same way satisfy their emotional needs, and one of the important tools in that effort is literature.<sup>183</sup> Literature is therefore not a “luxury,”<sup>184</sup> for the “sunny days,”<sup>185</sup> but is “obligatory,”<sup>186</sup> for any human society in the broad sense of the meaning.

The implication of the above-mentioned writers was clear. Pain and desperation should be a stimulant for the general good, rather than a deterrent leading to introversion. Isolationism or withdrawal into oneself was not a course of action for which any responsible writer should opt.

As reinforcement for their arguments the ardent advocates of resiliency evoke the tragic periods of Armenian history during which creative productivity not only had not ceased, but had buttressed the Armenians’ survival and forged the endurance of the “nation”. In this kind of narrative the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the consequent Golden Age of Armenian culture in the 5<sup>th</sup> century is the starting point.<sup>187</sup> In Levon Shant’s assessment the list of tragic events stretches from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>188</sup> Scores of people of great cultural significance parade through Shant’s article, such as Movses Khorenatsi (historian, 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century), Yeghishé (chronicler, 5<sup>th</sup> century), Krikor Naregatsi (poet, 10<sup>th</sup> century), Mkhitar Kosh (jurist, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century), Frig (poet, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century), Nahabed Kouchag (poet, 16<sup>th</sup> century), Naghash Hovnatan (poet, 17<sup>th</sup> century), Mekhitar Sepasdatsi.

<sup>183</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit, p. 7; *Anzhamanag Ezpaghoun* [Untimely Occupation], Levon Shant. *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3684, 13<sup>th</sup> June, Boston, 1924.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit, p. 7.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> See Levon Shant, *Anzhamanag Ezpaghoun*, loc. cit; *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, loc. cit. p. 227.

<sup>188</sup> He was confused about the centuries, since he is a century behind the given events (i.e. the cultural activities of Mkhitar Sepasdatsi were in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, indicated as 17<sup>th</sup> century; the same applies to the beginning of the modern phase of Armenian literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is indicated as the 18<sup>th</sup>).

He asserts that these cultural icons did not live in environments which were conducive for creativity. At the same time when the Armenian settlements were demolished these selfless people showed the brilliance of their talent. Hagop Sirouni recollects an emotional experience he had as a member of a committee responsible for the listing of old Armenian manuscripts. He tells that one day during a visit to an Armenian church in Constantinople they stumbled upon an old manuscript of the Bible. In the colophon of the Bible at the last stage of his task the illustrator was recording his thoughts, describing the last moments of his life. The enemy armies were about to capture the city of Sis,<sup>189</sup> and he was unwilling to escape before their arrival and his subsequent death. He was eager to complete his creative task, but after a time he was silenced.<sup>190</sup> Although the moral of the story is self-evident and needs no elaboration, it is worth stressing not only the urgency of the creative task, but the extent of the sacrifice that the artist faced.

Evidently, had the Armenians waited for a prosperous period of time in their turbulent history for the production of literature, they would have no literary heritage at all. This would diminish the status of the Armenians as a civilised “nation”.<sup>191</sup> The policy of survival, which was based on literary endeavours, has always been the only viable option in the framework for the construction and/or preservation of cultural identity. Creativity is the source which perpetuates the civilised existence of the Armenians<sup>192</sup> (this matter will be treated later). Hope for salvation should not be linked to the materialistic world; rather it is a notion which is more appropriately attached to intellectual and emotional activities. In this worldview the deep-rooted spirituality of Christianity is discernible. Literature is a vital tool in forging cultural identity of Armenians in diaspora. Language is at the heart of this endeavour, which differentiates Armenians as a linguistically distinct community from “Others”. The most important component of this discourse was faith,<sup>193</sup> one of the central pillars of the Christian religion. Faith for a better tomorrow and for a prosperous future would keep “fatalism”<sup>194</sup> at bay, and would propel scores of believers in the “rebirth” of the “nation” into the arena of reconstruction efforts because “we will have a tomorrow, we will; that is beyond any doubt,

<sup>189</sup> Sis was one of the main centres of Armenian Cilician kingdom. Sirouni does not mention the date of the event.

<sup>190</sup> *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, loc. cit., p. 226.

<sup>191</sup> Levon Shant, *Anzhamanag Ezpaghoum*, loc. cit.

<sup>192</sup> See *Menk Yev Arvesdé* [Us and Art], Sarkis Jizmejian. *Adroushan*, no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> April, p. 42, Izmir, 1919.

<sup>193</sup> See *Pghosgré Ashdaragné*, loc. cit., p. 227; Kourken Mekhitarian, *Zhoghovourté Tebi Kraganoutyun Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit., p. 498.

<sup>194</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit., p. 7, and *Zhoghovourté Tebi Kraganoutyun Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit., p. 498.

But until the dawn breaks, it is possible to lay the groundwork, and to erect pedestals in the souls, and to fill them with the trembling and with the longing for coming days.”<sup>195</sup>

### **Reorganisation of Armenian cultural life**

In the pre-Genocide Armenian diaspora the infrastructure to support cultural activities, in the form of educational, religious, and other buildings of cultural significance, had existed in the main diasporan communities, namely France, Egypt and the USA. There were three challenges that the political and cultural elite in the diaspora had to face. First, it was crucial to mobilise and reorganise the existing intellectual resources, namely writers, artists and the people from other intellectual or artistic spheres. The second issue was whether and how to bring together the intellectuals to harness their efforts in order to enlarge, and in the case of some to establish, the cultural infrastructure in the communities. And third, having established a certain representation of intellectuals the task should be to preserve and then promote cultural values.

At the beginning of the 1920s discussions about possible strategies of reconstruction were underway. There were abundant ideas and proposals ranging from constructive and practical ones to those which showed a degree of misassessment of the situation; some of these proposals lacked the practicality and clarity in terms of execution.

The periodical *Navasart* sums up the ongoing debates and gives a selection of these proposals without commenting on any of them.<sup>196</sup> The newspaper *Jagadamard* proposes the founding of an Association of Armenian Intellectuals. Arshag Chobanian puts forward a plan to establish in each community a school or courses in Armenian studies, as well as a community centre, where families can come together and lectures can be delivered. Zabel Yesayian in a personal letter to the editor of *Navasart* suggests bringing into being the Armenian House of Art in Paris with “healthy elements”<sup>197</sup> of the intellectuals. Vahan Tekeyian proposes the establishment of an Armenian home, on one of the islands of Greece,

<sup>195</sup> Kourken Mkhitarian, *Zhoghvourté Tebi Kraganoutyun Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit., p. 498.

<sup>196</sup> In the article the editor extracts from the original sources. I was not able to verify the accuracy of these citations. Therefore, in this text the citations are based on the mentioned source. See *Artsakank* [Echo], *Navasart*, no. 1, September, pp. 30-31, Bucharest, 1923.

<sup>197</sup> *Artsakank*, *Navasart*, no. 1, loc. cit. p. 30. The phrase “healthy elements” was a very vague description by someone whose political persuasion had a certain leaning and therefore should be treated with a degree of caution.

such as Corfu,<sup>198</sup> where fewer than five Western Armenian intellectuals and with the same number of young acolytes, would dedicate themselves to the fulfilment of the “task of intellectual and spiritual recovery” of the Armenian people. This would be a kind of “secular order”,<sup>199</sup> whose members would produce their own creative work and would also have the duty to publish and translate the literary works of other writers.<sup>200</sup> Tekeyian accentuates the “national” nature of the task by which he meant to include all sections of the diaspora regardless of political or other kinds of conviction. He also adds that these cultural undertakings should be conducted in an organised and methodical way, in order to prevent any “arbitrariness”<sup>201</sup> and “haphazardness”.<sup>202</sup>

Tekeyian's comments were accurate: divisiveness, disorganisation and incompetence were the three major faults which were the pervasive traits of the Armenian character. The favouritism shown towards certain individuals in the recruitment process for any kind of cultural activity was part of the Armenian culture in any undertaking in every domain and based on sympathy on either political or individual grounds. Because of this lack of fair selection procedures, Tekeyian worried that future cultural projects could be jeopardised by an incompetent approach.

#### *The preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage*

The most important issue that *Nor Sharzhoum* raised was the preservation of the Armenian heritage. In an editorial the exponent<sup>203</sup> of the latest proposal argues that even if the material loss of the Catastrophe<sup>204</sup> was immense, it could still be compensated for

<sup>198</sup> There was already an Armenian orphanage in Corfu.

<sup>199</sup> For both citations see *Artsakank, Navasart*, no. 1, loc. cit., p. 30.

<sup>200</sup> There are striking similarities between cultural activities of the Mkhitarist religious order on the islet of San Lazzaro and Vahan Tekeyian's proposed “secular order” of intellectuals on the island of Corfu. The role of the former was instrumental in forging the Armenian identity and the notion of Armenian nationhood. In the information given in *Navasart* there is no any allusion to any analogy drawn by Tekeyian between the cultural activities undertaken by Mkhitarist monks and the cultural activities that should be undertaken by the proposed “secular order”. Having said that, against the backdrop of the dreadful political situation in the homeland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries during which the bulk of the cultural work of Mkhitarist fathers was produced and bearing in mind the current situation of Armenians, it may be suggested that Tekeyian's proposal might be seen as the echo of an already moulded pattern of cultural response to calamity.

<sup>201</sup> *Artsakank, Navasart*, no. 1, loc. cit. p. 30.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> The editor of the periodical *Nor Sharzhoum* was Kourken Mkhitarian, and he was most likely the author of this editorial as well. I am inclined to this view based on the echoes of some ideas that he expressed in other articles.

<sup>204</sup> In the first decades of diaspora before the coinage of the term “Genocide” the atrocities were referred to as “Catastrophe” [*aghed*].

although the loss of the spiritual and intellectual heritage would have dire consequences. The dialects, lore and mores which are the “intellectual, spiritual and moral history of the Armenian people”<sup>205</sup> should be preserved for many reasons. Firstly, the natural habitat of these treasures, the Armenian homeland, perished and so the risk of their demise was imminent since the time would come when the holders of that cultural heritage would depart this life, taking a sizeable part of it with them. Secondly, there was a sense of urgency to preserve these cultural treasures: the bequeathing of national traditions and customs to the next generation is a sign of continuity linking the past to the present. To deny that would mean to cut the spiritual umbilical cord of the new generation, since these values are “essential factors of the national existence”.<sup>206</sup> Thirdly, contributing to the preservation of that cultural heritage is a popular obligation that requires each Armenian to do her/his part. But the bulk of the work should be done by the intellectuals as they have knowledge of provincial life and culture (some of them were from provinces), have insight into the dynamics of the provincial psyche and of the worldview of the people. Moreover, they have the skills and erudition to do methodological research, and most importantly they have the grounding in arts. From this arises the necessity of an umbrella organisation that can coordinate the task of conservation. By working together systematically a group of intellectuals can have a real effect. Lastly, the positive aspect of this work, as the editor mentions, is the prospect of the intellectuals and refugees coming together, since for the conservation work to be undertaken intellectuals and writers need to go to the source of the cultural heritage – the people.

Mkhitarian does not spell out the advantages of the encounter of the two groups at length, but there were conspicuous benefits. This interaction would be first-hand experience for the both sides. For the intellectuals it would be an occasion to be closely involved with the plight of the refugees which would be seen as a gesture of solidarity intended to alleviate their pain. Importantly, the meeting point of the two groups constituted Armenian culture, but the usual roles were reversed. The people were in the role of the producer, and the consumers (in this case the conservationists) were the writers and the intellectuals. This encounter would also give insight into the making of popular culture and enhance the knowledge of people of letters with regard to the dynamics of spiritual and intellectual undertakings on the popular level. If the intellectuals were the agents of the maintenance and especially the shaping of the

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<sup>205</sup> *Yergou Aracharg*, loc. cit., p. 298.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*



culture in diaspora, they had to have a clear understanding of the function of the culture. This leads us to the next point: the interaction of these two sides would generate a magnetic field of artistic activities, each side imparting the aesthetic experience of the other. For the writers, especially for the young generation, this interplay would be an occasion to enhance their knowledge of the Armenian cultural heritage. Through this cultural activity they would familiarise themselves with the lost homeland that they barely remembered, a source of two contradictory feelings, pain and inspiration. Therefore the culture would not only be the catalyst to enhance their knowledge but also to construct the diasporan cultural identity. A rich cultural heritage – fairytales, popular songs for different functions, riddles and adages – are the vital components of creativity for any society. Within them lie the wisdom and experience of generations and so folklore was the raw material upon which the future literary edifice could be constructed.

The portrayal of the plight of the refugees in literature could have been one of the by-products of the writer-people approach. The latest collective experience of Armenians could offer these writers rich material for literary subject matter. If this were the case then we would witness a marriage between literature and people and the literature would be more people orientated (this matter will be treated later).

#### *The foundation of an association of intellectuals*

The debates on this matter intensified and took definite practical shape in proposals put forward by the Cairo-based literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoum* in 1923. At the outset the writer of the editorial underlines the need for the uniting of intellectuals<sup>207</sup> under the umbrella of an association. In its first editorial the periodical set the objective bringing the intellectuals together for the “great Cooperation of tomorrow”<sup>208</sup> on the very neutral ground of literature, away from the political strife. Any form of activity, especially cultural, on a “national” level in any Armenian diasporan community has always been a minefield, where political rivalries were the determinant dynamics. Mkhitarian was mindful of well-established culture, therefore he tries to depoliticise the literary arena for any future collective activity. This political disengagement would guarantee the engagement of all the intellectuals and writers of any conviction as well as enhance the productivity of their efforts.

<sup>207</sup> The meaning of the intellectual should be taken in a broad sense, which would include the people of letters and art, and anyone linked to intellectual activities.

<sup>208</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé*, *Nor Sharzhoum*, loc. cit., p. 2.

From Paris, Mgrdich Barsamian, after assessing the disorganised and unenviable state of Armenian intellectuals, reiterates the same demand for regrouping.<sup>209</sup> Peniamin Tashian calls for the gathering and mobilisation of Armenian intellectuals, especially as intellectuals in other nations are taking similar steps in the post-war period. He complains that Armenians are lagging behind their European counterparts; however, he realises the task of the Armenian intellectuals is more complex given the fact that they are geographically dispersed over vast areas, and live in diverse political, social and cultural climates. In the host countries they do not share the same political and social values, therefore “they cannot keep the same rhythm of feeling and thought, the same measure of activity and freedom”.<sup>210</sup> Here the question arises as to how to bridge the cultural gap and avoid the gap in development and avoid the differences between different groups within the same society. He proposes the creation of unity in “thought”<sup>211</sup> and “culture”,<sup>212</sup> thus creating the breeding ground of “ethnic” Armenian culture, exempt from the yoke of foreign thought. He complains that Armenians have “the vice of emulating”<sup>213</sup> others, and attributes this to a “national” trait, and he pinpoints two domains, politics and literature, which were the most affected by this kind of approach. Tashian’s judgements on politics were based on the most recent collective experience of deceit. According to him the lack of “national policy”<sup>214</sup> kept Armenians dependent on the political whims and stratagems of foreign powers: in vain Armenians repeatedly put their trust in outside intervention only to be disappointed. Humanity has not changed since; there is still a lack of “conscience”.<sup>215</sup>

This kind of rhetoric encapsulated the distrust and contempt of Armenians towards the outside world. In this context the internalisation of the intellectuals and the refugees of their local cultures in different countries could prove to be detrimental. The cultivation of uniform Armenian values would create stability on “ethnic” grounds. In the view of this ethnocentric attitude the unification of the intellectuals was a vital priority in order to create the overarching values which would be the backbone of the Armenian cultural identity. Of course, the ethnicity of Armenians was based on the same shared values of religion, language

<sup>209</sup> See *Mortsevadzneré* [The Forgotten], Mgrdich Barsamian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 29, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, pp. 441-444, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>210</sup> See *Mdavoraganerou Zorasharzh* [Mobilisation of Intellectuals], Peniamin Tashian. *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 20, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, p. 308, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p.309.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p.308.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p.309.

and culture, but having said that, the new conditions needed corresponding responses. The creation of uniform values would also keep foreign influences at bay. The writer fails to spell out the nature and content of the “culture” and “thought” which would unify the intellectuals in dispersion.

As we see, the concerns of the polemicist in this debate were centred on the idea that the enormity of the task of reconstruction needed corresponding collective efforts. The individual or separate efforts would be a drop in the ocean and realisation would be an uphill struggle, whilst the collective effort would not only be far more productive, but also enhance the spirit of togetherness of the writers. It would also set the precedent of cooperation between intellectuals across the political spectrum, something that they failed to achieve in Constantinople. In the current diaspora situation it would be highly irresponsible for intellectuals to abandon their vital responsibilities and pursue individual goals. The long-existent unconstructive dynamics of individualistic concerns and personal enmity had to be substituted by more constructive and productive ones.

The realisation of any form of representation of Armenians has always been a daunting challenge and a thorny issue. As Tashian sarcastically confides, it is difficult to bring ten Armenians together; even if one succeeds in this, ten of them together cannot accomplish the work of half a man.<sup>216</sup> What the result of the combined efforts would be is difficult to say, but one thing was clear, that as far as literature was concerned the efforts were the result of sporadic individual initiatives. At best they were confined within the boundaries of a certain political party, and in general they were managed in a piecemeal manner.

### **The Financial Situation and Integrity of the Writers**

As I have discussed, the reconstruction of the cultural infrastructure was much dependent on the diligent work and unified endeavours of the intellectuals and the writers. The question now arises as to who these people were and in what kind of environments they laboured. What were the dynamics of diasporan Armenian cultural life in the years of its formation? Here one pivotal issue arises, concerning the integrity of these cultural architects. The moral dimension of the issue had a bearing on the developmental process of the culture. As it is the case in any society, a healthy and productive cultural life was contingent upon the moral weight of these people.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p.308.

I have discussed the ideological affiliation of the writers and critics (see Chapters One and Two). Here I will examine the financial side of the issue, the welfare of the people of letters, and its moral implications. Like all Armenians, the intellectual elite shared the same fate and were consigned to bitterness and abject poverty. If writers had to spend a considerable amount of their time and energy in solving the mundane problems of everyday life how could one expect them to produce anything of cultural significance?

The debate started in the first half of the 1920s and focused on the necessity of taking immediate action to ameliorate the living conditions of intellectuals by providing them with financial assistance. It also focused on the relationship between on one hand the recipients of the help (the artists and writers) and on the other the donors, which in this case happened to be affluent Armenians and a small number of Armenian cultural organisations.

The literary periodical *Navasart* (Bucharest) raises legitimate questions:<sup>217</sup> Who was the intellectual? What constituted an intellectual? Who would decide and how would it be decided who was entitled to assistance? The periodical does not seek the answers to these questions; rather it makes the acute observation that social and political upheavals had distorted the criteria for evaluation. In a society where in every domain there was a considerable decline in the standards of evaluation and “the boundaries of the intellect were blurred”,<sup>218</sup> any promise of financial assistance would thrust the opportunists to the arena, thus depriving the “real”,<sup>219</sup> and “worthy”,<sup>220</sup> intellectuals from necessary assistance.

There are two important points to be made: the contentious issue of representation and the mechanism (or lack of it) which would decide the selection criteria to determine who would fit the mould of an intellectual, and secondly the eligibility of the given intellectual. In the politically divided diaspora this would put extra strain on inter-communal relations and the doors would be open wide to unhealthy sectarian competition which would refuel personal rivalries.

The writer of the article urges the people of culture to stay above the materialistic attitude in order not to decrease “the faith of coming days”<sup>221</sup> and to keep alight “the old light

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<sup>217</sup> See *Artsakank* [Echo], *Navasart*, no. 4, December, p. 125, Bucharest, 1923.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

which comes from old centuries",<sup>222</sup> of which intellectuals are the guardians and those who "will hand down to the next generation".<sup>223</sup>

Evidently, the columnist of *Navasart* (with utmost probability Hagop Sirouni) puts the role of intellectuals in a wider historical context where there is no doubt about the importance of the moral aspect of the issue. The person of culture should not descend into decadent modes of activity, but it does not finish there. They had a pivotal role to play in the maintenance and construction of cultural identity: they had to bridge the achievements of the past and the generation of the present, thus becoming the vehicle of continuity. This was the mission on which they had to embark.

The debate<sup>224</sup> was triggered in earnest in 1925 by an event held in the USA by affluent Armenians at which rapturous welcome was accorded to Michael Arlen (see Appendix), one of the best-selling novelists of his time in England. Avedis Aharonian was indignant at the honours that Arlen received and he compared this with the fact that there was total disregard and contempt towards Armenian writers by the same affluent people. He vented his anger in an article published in *Hayrenik*,<sup>225</sup> and accused them of having a negligent attitude not only to people of letters, but also to literature. Their financial assistance would alleviate the abject existence of the writers.

Zabel Yesayian<sup>226</sup> adds her voice to the condemnation of the wealthy in respect of their ignorance towards literature, but she categorically rejects the idea that an artist or writer should receive financial help. She insists that the vocational choice of any writer is made by their free will and therefore that writers in the diaspora had to live up to their commitments. She voices her concern that any sympathetic financial gesture would turn Armenian writers into "a parasite and therefore useless to society".<sup>227</sup>

A similar opinion is expressed in *Navasart* (Bucharest), although the writer Hagop Sirouni agrees with Aharonian's remarks on the indifference of the affluent towards values of cultural significance; he distances himself from the idea of attaching creative productivity to

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> *Navasart* (Bucharest) sums up the ongoing debates published in different printed outlets, which engulfed writers, such as Avedis Aharonian, Zabel Yesayian and Arshag Chobanian. To check each of the original articles was beyond my means, therefore my main source is the account given by *Navasart*.

<sup>225</sup> *Navasart* does not mention whether it is published in *Hayrenik* (Boston) newspaper or its sister publication the monthly literary supplement. See *Hay Harousdn Ou Hay Kroghé* [The Armenian Rich Man and the Armenian Writer], no.4, July-August, pp. 97-99, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>226</sup> The article of Zabel Yesayian was published in *Haghtanag* [Victory] weekly (Constantinople, 1925). No references were mentioned.

<sup>227</sup> See *Hay Harousdn Ou Hay Kroghé*, loc .cit. p. 98.

the welfare of the writer. There were other inner driving forces which led the writer to creativity and these were not dependent on the wellbeing of the writer or on favourable life conditions. Those who were after privileges and sponsorship were the “beggars”<sup>228</sup>, “sycophants”<sup>229</sup> and “parasites”<sup>230</sup>. This was the robust stance taken by *Navasart* in defence of aesthetic grounds and for the real mission of people involved in the arts.

However the two protagonists Aharonian and Yesayan agree on two points. Firstly, they implicitly share the concern that the contemptuous treatment of the Armenian writers was degrading and therefore reprehensible. But there was the other side of the coin, about which both writers prefer not to speak. In the diaspora at large the distorted image of intellectuals was inherited from Constantinople, where the intellectual’s vocation was often equated with charlatanism. The renowned Western Armenian satirist Hagop Baronian (1843-1891) immortalised the opportunistic character of the Armenian intellectuals in his book *Medzabadiv Mouratsganer* [The Most Honourable Beggars] (Constantinople, 1888). In one of the scenes a poet cunningly puts all his acting and rhetorical skills into practice in order to defraud the naïve Apisoghom Agha. Another renowned Western Armenian satirist Yervant Odian created the eponymous character of his acclaimed trilogy<sup>231</sup> *Enger Panchouni* [Comrade Panchouni], where he depicted a corrupt and charlatan revolutionary intellectual activist. This was the perception of intellectuals within Armenian society. Therefore, the lack of respect by the wealthy and to a lesser extent by Armenians from different social strata was commonplace. Armenians did not understand the important role of the intellectuals in public life, especially in the post-Genocide era.

Secondly, the opinions of both writers converge on the issue that the real power base of the writer was the people,<sup>232</sup> who was the producer and the repository of values of national significance. Hence the writers would only be appreciated by the same people who were the guardians of the culture. Here, I would like to stress that this writer-people approach would mark the beginning of the new phase of artistic collaboration, opening to the writers a new window of cultural exploration. People-based aesthetics was the evolving trend of the day. The approach of the writer to the grassroots would produce another benefit as well by

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> *Arakeloutyum Mé I Dzablvar* [A Mission to Dzablvar] (It was published in the journal *Pyuzantion* in Constantinople in 1910), *Enger Panchouni Vasbouragani Mech* [Comrade Panchouni in Vasbouragan] (Constantinople, 1914), and *Enger Panchouni Darakroutian Mech* [Comrade Panchouni in Exile] (1924)

<sup>232</sup> See *Hay Harousdn Ou Hay Kroghé*, loc. cit., pp. 98-99.

reinforcing the dignity and integrity of the writer by extending the boundaries of the readership, and the writer would not under any circumstances be subject to the whims of a financial backer.

According to the periodical *Navasart* both writers were at odds with the composition of the people who would provide the moral backing to the writers. For Aharonian, who was a member of the ARF, it was the literati composed of common people, who were taking shape in exile among the ranks of the refugees; at the other end of the argument, Zabel Yesayan firmly states that the burgeoning literature was inherently linked to the efforts of the population in the developing homeland, namely Soviet Armenia.

From the above-expressed views it is clear that one of the sources of the disagreement on this point was political. This was the period when ARF was reorganising its party's grassroots support in the diasporan communities, creating the infrastructure and extending its political influence. In this sense the quest for moral support for the people of culture among the masses of refugees could be interpreted from a political point of view. Aharonian tries to assert the legitimacy of the stateless refugees in diaspora as a support base. On the other hand, there was not even a modicum of doubt about the sincerity of Zabel Yesayan's conviction towards the prospering Soviet Armenian homeland, or a lack of empathy toward the refugees (with whom she was closely involved as early as 1909 in the aftermath of the massacres of Adana) by not considering them as a legitimate base of future literary development. It was more a matter of centrality. As far as she was concerned, the centre of the weight of any cultural enterprise could only have been Soviet Armenia, where there was a state with distinct boundaries and a prospering nation, regardless of the ideological character of the regime, it was a reference point of inspiration, in contrast to the state of instability in dispersion. It is noteworthy that Yesayan had always avoided grappling with the issues pertinent to Soviet Armenia, such as lack of pluralism and artistic freedom, which culminated in the creation of ideologically driven literature. She always depicted the brighter side of the homeland, economical growth and cultural success.

Arshag Chobanian dwelled upon the practical side of the argument by trying to shore up the support of two Armenian organisations, namely the New York-based *Hay Grtagan Himnargoutyun* [Armenian Educational Institute] (henceforth AEI) and the AGBU. He blames both of the organisations for not being generous enough towards literature.<sup>233</sup> He puts

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<sup>233</sup> My information is based on the account given by *Navasart* and subsequent excerpts were from *Baykar* [Struggle], where Chobanian's series of articles on this subject was published. I had no means to check the

forward a proposal to the former to support the publishing and distributing of books. As for the latter, Arshag Chobanian remembers that after his plea for help, the founder of the organisation, Noubar Pasha, earmarked £250<sup>234</sup> to be shared for the assistance of the needy writers. But the following year<sup>235</sup> the amount was reduced to £80, and this was from an organisation with an enormous amount of wealth.<sup>236</sup> He reiterates his plea and urges the members of the AGBU to put pressure on the central board of trustees in order to make generous donations to this cause. He also makes a plea to the Armenians at large to channel their financial support through the AGBU.<sup>237</sup>

*Navasart* (Bucharest) scrutinises the effectiveness of the activities of these two organizations and takes a less lenient position on their accountability. According to the periodical the earmarked sums were not purposefully spent. Neither Armenian writers nor Armenian literature benefited from donations, but rather “parasites”<sup>238</sup> got hold of most of the assistance. The periodical asserts that it is reasonable to assume malpractice in the case of the AGBU funds, the way the “alms are being distributed”<sup>239</sup> and the way in which the sums are “melting away”.<sup>240</sup> And an accusation akin to the first was directed to the AEI especially about the accountability of their publishing funds, and the selection criteria of literary works. The way the questions were raised implied that there was some kind of mismanagement and unhealthy practice. The writer does not spell out the issue, and fails to identify the “parasites” to whom he refers. It would be pure speculation to say whether there was some degree of mismanagement of funds, either in the shape of incompetence or privileged treatment of certain individual writers on political or personal grounds. Having said that, Arshag Chobanian, who had close links with AGBU circles, praises Dikran Gamsaragan’s competence and fairness in distributing the sums of money to people of letters or their families. According to him the different branches of the AGBU were kept informed about the sums that had been spent, however out of courtesy there was no press release.<sup>241</sup> I do not

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primary sources. See *Hay Kroghin Vijagé* [The Condition of the Armenian Writer], Vaché, *Navasart*, no. 6, November, p. 192, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>234</sup> The currency of the amount is not mentioned. I assume that it was English sterling given the fact that then it had the status of international currency; therefore AGBU financial funds were deposited in English sterling.

<sup>235</sup> The date of the year is not mentioned, but it should be sometime before 1925.

<sup>236</sup> See Vaché, *Hay Kroghin Vijagé*, loc. cit., p. 192.

<sup>237</sup> This story is based on the excerpts cited by *Navasart* from LDP organ newspaper *Baykar* (no details are given and no references are made).

<sup>238</sup> See *Tsetseré* [The Termites], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 6, November, p. 162, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. The writer sarcastically refers to the assistance given as “alms”.

<sup>240</sup> See *Tsetseré*, loc. cit., p. 162.

<sup>241</sup> See *Hay Kroghin Vijagé*, loc. cit., p. 192.



know who were the recipients were, what were the criteria for choosing them, and how much each individual received.

Debates on this issue continued for quite some time. For Vahan Tekeyian the issue of assistance was beyond the benefit of individuals, his scope of concern was wider and encompassed the state of the literature itself. In 1929 he emphatically raised the consuming questions regarding the patronage of literature. He wondered how to make rich people realise the importance of literature in terms of “preserving and *constructing* a nation”<sup>242</sup> [writer’s italics] [*azk bahbanelou yev shinelou*] because it was the repository of many “ethnic” markers, namely language, religion and history. All these “ethnic” values were bequeathed by literature. In this context the contribution of wealthy people would be invaluable to provide the much-needed literary texts for the masses at large. He urges them besides other charitable works to support the artistic and literary efforts at reconstruction.<sup>243</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the discourse on this issue one question surprisingly was not raised by any protagonists. Was it morally justifiable for people of letters to seek special treatment when hundreds of thousands of their brethren were in abject poverty? At the time it seemed that not only was the dilemma nonexistent, but that there was in fact an effort to accommodate both the morality and the material benefit of the privileges sought. Chobanian focuses on the practical side of the issue. As far as he was concerned the relation between a people and its intellectuals was reciprocal: the intellectual toils for the “nation” and in return the writer had to be looked after. He exhorts Armenians to make donations to the writers at the expense of the orphans and refugees, who were being looked after by many Armenians and foreigners,<sup>244</sup> while none provided support and comfort for the people of letters.<sup>245</sup>

While Chobanian was ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the writers, Tekeyian was ready to make the same sacrifice for literature. For him the intellectual decay of the “nation” had more far-reaching consequences than its physical demise. Depriving the new generation of interaction with literature by not providing the necessary publications was an irreparable immoral and criminal act, more hideous than a physical crime. It was therefore morally justifiable to divert financial resources to support literary enterprises from relief money, even

<sup>242</sup> See *Kraganoutyun* [Literature], V. T., *Arev* [Sun], no. 3097, 13<sup>th</sup> April, Cairo, 1929.

<sup>243</sup> See *Kegharvesdé Yev Kraganoutyuné Kaghoutneroun Mech* [Fine Arts and Literature in the Communities], V. T., *Arev*, no.3069, 9<sup>th</sup> March, Cairo, 1929.

<sup>244</sup> He refers to the foreign relief organizations.

<sup>245</sup> Vaché, *Hay Kroghin Vijagé*, loc. cit., p. 192.

if that would cause the death of a “few hundred or few thousand sick and poor people... oh, even orphans” but would allow “the Armenian nation to exist morally”.<sup>246</sup>

It was an odd way of thinking and could easily lead people to question the integrity of the person making these moral judgements. But the issue was multifaceted and its interpretation from the ethical angle would be superficial and unhelpful in understanding the core of the question. It is important to understand the state of artists and writers, who felt neglected and betrayed by their own people. This was happening during a time when they were trying to find a remedy for the emotional and intellectual needs of the same people who turned away from art. There was an air of ingratitude, and this, coupled with the personal pain of the catastrophe, almost drove people in the arts to the brink of despair. There was also some sense of urgency to take immediate action which stemmed from the unenviable conditions of the writers, and the immediate changes needed drastic measures. Another important point was the fact that there was a deep-seated Christian perception of the primacy of the soul over the flesh: for the purification and salvation of the soul it was permissible to ignore the flesh, even to allow the body to perish. The concept of martyrdom was intrinsically connected to this idea of sacrificing body for the sake of soul. From the historical point of view, during their turbulent history Armenians had to pay a very high price even at the expense of human life for their “ethnic” survival and for the preservation of their “ethnic” values. Consequently, in the absence of statehood, human sacrifice was the ultimate and only guarantee of the survival of the “nation”.

### **Readership, Books and the Culture of Reading**

The existence and the development of any form of cultural activity in the Armenian communities in dispersion depended on the active engagement of the bearers of that culture. In the wake of the Genocide the cultural appetite of Armenians in dispersion slumped to the lowest level. As I mentioned earlier this was due to the refugees’ priority of physical survival. The other factor was the trauma and the demoralisation among the refugees. As Peniamin Tashian accurately observed, one half of the Armenians were mourning the other half.<sup>247</sup> People were not in the right frame of mind to appreciate or enjoy any kind of artistic production and this hindered the development of the culture. Moreover, in the post-First

<sup>246</sup> See V. T., *Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit.

<sup>247</sup> See *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyumé* [Towards the Ethnic Literature], Part I, Peniamin Tashian, *Nor Sharzhoum*, no. 48-49, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, p. 715, Cairo, 1924.

World War era, as a result of carnage and destruction, moral and aesthetic values were distorted; despair and alienation were commonplace. This resulted in the emergence of a materialistic evaluation of the human values either nationally or internationally. Levon Shant recounts the prevailing decadence of the time, when materialistic criteria become the yardstick of any kind of evaluation and he likens the current situation to a witch's cauldron in which the human conscience and soul are melted together with gold.<sup>248</sup> In the newspaper *Housaper* the editor ponders this changing landscape of moral depravation and the decline in standards. He asserts that the spiritual and moral values of people, as compared to their material wealth, would be worth less than half a penny.<sup>249</sup> And the Armenian people were no different: across the social divisions of rich and poor one way or another they were affected either by political upheavals or materialistic avarice.

In such an environment what was the place of literature and the people of letters? Above, I discussed the conduct of the wealthy towards literature and especially towards writers. Here, very briefly I discuss the intellectual formation and the reading habits at the more common level.<sup>250</sup> In this sense it is important to identify the demographic composition of the Armenian refugees in the diasporan communities with regard to their provenance, whether they were from Armenia, Cilicia or urban centres. I talked about the proliferation of Armenian schools in the settlements in mainland Armenia and other parts of Ottoman Turkey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter Two). In contrast to the urban centres, namely Constantinople and Smyrna, education in the rural settlements was limited to a small number of people due to cultural and economic factors. The majority of the population was illiterate and so they were not exposed to any form of written literature. They were however in possession of the most valuable source of cultural treasure, which was the oral literature, so they did have some experience of interacting with literature.

In the Armenian communities in the USA the number of refugees from mainland Armenia was considerable, especially those from the densely Armenian-populated city of Kharpert (Harput) and surrounding villages. Although Kharpert possessed educational institutions, and a generation of diasporan writers such as Vahé Hayg, Peniamin Nourigian, Hamasdegh (1895-1966) (for details on these writers see Appendix) and others had received their

<sup>248</sup> See *Vhoughnerou Gatsan* [The Cauldron of the Witches], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3686, 15<sup>th</sup> June, Boston, 1924.

<sup>249</sup> See *Kraganoutyuné Yev Ir Mshagé* [Literature and its Toiler], editorial, *Housaper*, no. 218, 14<sup>th</sup> December, Cairo, 1929.

<sup>250</sup> I am not aware of the existence of any research or statistics on this matter.

elementary education in these institutions, the majority of the people were illiterate and worked in the agricultural sector. In a very brief survey of Armenian American literature one of the writers at the newspaper *Hayrenik* states that 90% of Armenians in the USA were composed of the peasantry who had emigrated from mainland Armenia. Before their arrival in the USA many of them were illiterate; it was only after their arrival that they somehow managed to achieve a low level of knowledge of written Armenian, enough to read a newspaper.<sup>251</sup> In another account the writer unapologetically observes that the number of educated Armenians in the USA is tiny.<sup>252</sup> These accounts give an idea of the developmental possibilities for literature not only in the USA, but also in other communities in the diaspora.

In the Middle Eastern communities, namely Syria and Lebanon, where the majority of the refugees were composed of Cilician peasantry, the situation was far from comforting. The situation was slightly different in Egypt, where there were well-established Armenian communities in Cairo and Alexandria with a cultural and educational infrastructure. In the Armenian communities in France such as Marseille, Lyon and especially Paris there was a large number of Armenian refugees from the urban centres of Ottoman Turkey like Constantinople and Smyrna. By virtue of abundant high-quality educational institutions in these cities, their command of Armenian was not only adequate for consuming the printed materials in Armenian but also to help it become the main centre of its production.

The reading habits in the Armenian communities were therefore conditioned by a low level of literacy, apathy towards literature and a preoccupation with physical survival. This “indifference”<sup>253</sup> was enough reason for some intellectuals to sound the alarm, especially those for whom literature and the language were a crucial component in the reconstruction of the Armenian way of life in the diaspora. For the literary periodical *Pyunig* it was crucial that Armenians continue to fulfil their responsibilities for developing civilisation through literature – as they had done in the past – and not allow the trauma they had experienced to hinder this effort.<sup>254</sup> In this sense the role of the people could be instrumental in the

<sup>251</sup> See *Kragan Sharzhoun* [Literary Movement], Orora, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 2708, 26<sup>th</sup> March, Boston, 1921. Although the above-mentioned figure has no scientific credibility, it gives an overall picture of the level of literacy.

<sup>252</sup> *Lezou, Kraganoutyun, Tseghayin Koyoutyun* [Language, Literature, Racial Existence], Y. M., Part IV, *Baykar* [Struggle], no. 4, 5<sup>th</sup> January, Boston, 1923.

<sup>253</sup> 1920, editorial, *Pyunig*, no. 1, January, p. 1503, Boston, 1920.

<sup>254</sup> *Anhedatsadz Kragan Serounté Yev “Pyunig”*, loc. cit., p. 1186.

development of culture by giving their vital support to those who “do not want to abandon the trenches of the civilisation and progress”,<sup>255</sup> namely the writers.

Therefore, the development of literature was contingent upon the cooperation of these two vital components – the people and the writer – they were in a reciprocal relation, and neither could exist without the other. For the achievement of such cooperation it was necessary to bring the two sides into equilibrium, the producer of the literature and its consumer. Producers of literature had to find a discriminating audience, one which had certain intellectual tools and the experience to evaluate literature. The picture of the Armenian readership in the first half of the 1920s in terms of number and sophistication was not comforting. With such an unsophisticated readership, keeping pace with the developmental process of contemporary civilisation – as the intellectuals would wish it – would be a difficult task.

### *The importance of reading*

At this juncture Levon Shant enters the scene once more. In a series of seven articles published in the newspaper *Hayrenik* from 15 June to 10 July 1924 he addressed the issue of illiteracy, the reading habits of the readership, and the beneficial aspects of reading. The scope of his concerns seems much wider, since he rarely makes direct reference to the Armenian milieu. However, when we situate this discourse in the context of post-Genocide survival, the real concerns of Shant become clear. He especially was one among the writers who took much interest in the matters concerning Armenian literature, culture and education.

Shant underlines with great satisfaction the fact that since classical and medieval times the number of readers had radically increased.<sup>256</sup> As a result of the invention of printing, books became widely available. Most importantly compulsory education widened the circle of the readers, thus extending access to reading beyond the domain of the few. Having said that, some ethnic groups and nations were deprived not only of books and the joy of reading, but also of having an alphabet and therefore written literature, although they still had a rich oral literary tradition, as the case was with the Kurds. In other nations such as Persia, China and India illiteracy was still rife although they were in possession of a rich literary tradition.

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> See Levon Shant, *Vehougnrou Gatsan*, loc. cit.

Despite the high proportion of literate people in some civilised societies, the culture of reading was not rooted.<sup>257</sup>

In a series of articles dedicated to the various beneficial aspects of reading, Shant emphasises the role of the literary book as a human's best friend. Reading is a conversation with the writer or with the characters, which the writer creates. Such conversations enrich and broaden the scope of our experience; we identify ourselves with the characters; we empathise with and analyse them; we share their happiness and pain, their ideals and principles. Thus, we lay spiritual bridges and the book becomes part of our inner self and it fuses the human "me"<sup>258</sup> to the "not me",<sup>259</sup> bringing us into contact with a wider circle of people of similar experience. During the act of reading there is an enjoyment attached to the different activities of the mind, such as thinking, judging, observing and imagining. Another source of enjoyment is generated by the effect of the technical aspect of the book, such as the plot, the protagonists, the language and the imagery.<sup>260</sup> Reading also evokes memories, revives emotions and provokes thoughts; we identify ourselves with a given book.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, conveying the reader into another sphere of existence, the book gives transitory consolation of the soul and relief from pain.<sup>262</sup> All in all, the book was the one of the pillars of society, educating and civilising people.<sup>263</sup> Shant wonders in astonishment that for intellectual and emotional cultivation why such a "sharp and important weapon",<sup>264</sup> namely reading, was ignored.

I would like to make some comment on a number of these points. By giving such importance to the book, Shant's main aim was to create a positive image and emphasise the importance of the book as a useful tool for educating oneself, much like a textbook. Used like this, reading not only popularised literature but also other sources of information that would contribute to enhancing knowledge at the level of the common people. This naturally would lead to the establishment of a culture of reading, and in the case of literature it would widen the scope of its influence through the creation of a class of literati. Moreover, books

<sup>257</sup> He does not corroborate this claim.

<sup>258</sup> *Kirké Enger* [The Book as Friend], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3703, 6<sup>th</sup> July, Boston, 1924.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> See *Kirké Vayelk* [The Book as Enjoyment], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3704, 8<sup>th</sup> July, Boston, 1924.

<sup>261</sup> See *Kirké "Yes"* [The Book as "Me"], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3705, 9<sup>th</sup> July, Boston, 1924.

<sup>262</sup> See *Kirké Amok* [The Book as Solace], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3706, 10<sup>th</sup> July, Boston, 1924.

<sup>263</sup> See Levon Shant, *Kirké Enger*, loc. cit.

<sup>264</sup> See *Kirké Ousoum* [The Book as Education], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3702, 4<sup>th</sup> July, Boston, 1924.

would expose people to universal human values; they were cultural windows opened to the outside world, thus generating and shaping the cultural values of each locality, levelling the pace of the development of civilisation of different societies. The completion of these responsibilities would lead Armenians to assume a role in the development of civilisation, as the editorial in *Pyunig* suggested (see above). Books also have a cathartic role for the human soul, especially in grief-stricken societies, healing wounds and making life more bearable. Levon Shant outlines the ways in which reading is vital to society, without referring to any social grouping.

Shant evokes the image of the death march in the Syrian desert of Deir Zor, the Auschwitz of the Armenian Genocide, when Armenian mothers would teach their children the Armenian alphabet on the sands of the desert. He concludes “that is the way life is; that is what progress demands”.<sup>265</sup>

### *Books*

During the 1920s according to some accounts there was an acute shortage of Armenian books in the diaspora. The publication of books was at the bottom of the list of priorities. Financial assistance from Armenian and foreign sources was aimed at the refugees’ physical rather than intellectual relief. The infrastructure for the mass production of books was not yet in place and there were few printing presses or publishing houses in the diaspora on a par with the Mkhitarist printing houses in Vienna and Venice, the press of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and elsewhere. The availability of books was limited to the few who could afford them. In the editorial of its first issue a Salonica-based periodical cites the high cost and unavailability of books as one of its principal reasons for publication.<sup>266</sup> Vahan Tekeyian states that Armenians in the diaspora are unable to afford books<sup>267</sup> and he urges that the wealthy support the efforts to remedy this matter. He also attempts to involve Soviet Armenia in efforts to reconstruct intellectual and spiritual values in the diaspora by urging them to send literary materials.<sup>268</sup> Arshag Chobanian proposes the establishment of a publishing house and a bookshop, which will operate with European standards and marketing

<sup>265</sup> See Levon Shant, *Anzhamanag Ezpaghoum*, loc. cit.

<sup>266</sup> See “*Olimbosi*” *Nebadagé*, loc. cit., p. 8.

<sup>267</sup> See V. T., *Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit.

<sup>268</sup> See V. T. *Kegharvesdé Yev Kraganoutyuné Kaghoutneroun Mech*, loc. cit.

skills.<sup>269</sup> But even if the problem of the availability of books were solved, a major hurdle would remain, namely how to engage people with literature. The apathy of readers went hand in hand with the decrease in book consumption, which in turn discouraged writers from publishing their work; this was the verdict of *Navasart*.<sup>270</sup> Because the publication of books was funded mainly by writers themselves, low sales meant that they had to shoulder the whole financial burden, with all its negative consequences. Kourken Mkhitarian asserts that after 15 years of the first publication of the works (1000 copies) of some prominent writers the books were still not sold.<sup>271</sup> Another contributing factor to the slump in consumption was the culture of borrowing and lending books among people. Even the libraries were economical when it came to buying Armenian books.<sup>272</sup>

### Post-Genocide Literature of Diaspora

There is no an exact date or publication which would mark the beginning of Armenian literature in the post-Genocide diaspora. Its genesis was inherently linked to the emergence of the printed press and subsequent journalistic activities. However, we cannot ignore the role of Armenian literary activities in Constantinople and Smyrna in preparing the ground for post-Genocide literature in Western Armenian. This period comprises the time from Armistice until the fall of Constantinople to Mustafa Kemal's nationalist army in 1922. The publication of *Adroushan* in Izmir (Smyrna) in 1919 (seven issues) and *Partsravank* in Constantinople in 1922 (six issues) represented the first efforts to bring together intellectuals and writers dispersed by the war. *Partsravank* in particular, which was published by the prominent surviving writers such as Hagop Oshagan, Gosdan Zarian, Vahan Tekeyian, set the tone of the literary and artistic efforts and reinstated the gravity of Western Armenian literature. Marc Nichanian accurately underlines the significance of this period and the important role of these writers in the literary formation of the young writers who were the

<sup>269</sup> See *Artsakank*, *Navasart*, no. 1, September, p. 30, Bucharest, 1923.

<sup>270</sup> See *Ov Gé Dzdzé Hay Kroghin Krdinké* [Who Sucks the Sweat of the Armenian Writer], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 4, July-August, p. 100, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>271</sup> See *Kraganoutyuné Yev Knnatadoutyuné* [Literature and Criticism], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Housaper*, part I, no. 41, 20<sup>th</sup> May, Cairo, 1929. My own experience confirms this as even today in my local Armenian bookshops in an Armenian neighborhood of Beirut I can still find books on display which were printed some 50-60 years ago. This says a lot about the prevalent cultural pattern of reading among Armenians.

<sup>272</sup> See *Ov Gé Dzdzé Hay Kroghin Krdinké*, loc. cit.



driving force of their generation in Paris, especially the group who were associated with the journal *Menk*<sup>273</sup> (1931-1932).<sup>274</sup>

In the first half of the 1920s what may be called Armenian literature of diaspora began to take shape. And from the second half of the same decade a new generation of writers known as *anabadi serount* [generation of the desert] or *vorperou serount* [generation of orphans]<sup>275</sup> made their mark on the literary scene. The literary playground of the young writers was mainly the printed press, which along with outstanding creative endeavours was littered with mediocre literary productions. At the end of the decade diasporan literature had a distinct shape in terms of the spheres of literary interests.

Three main trends can be identified in literature as follows. The first was *kyughi kraganoutyun* [literature of the village] (it is also known as *garodi kraganoutyun* [literature of longing]), which came from the pre-Genocide experience, evoking the lost rural life of the homeland. Hamasdegh's *Kyughé* [The Village] (1924, Boston) and *Antsrevé* [The Rain] (1929, Paris) reflect these themes.<sup>276</sup> In these collections of short stories Hamasdegh melancholically recounts the life of his native countryside of Kharpert (Harput). The peasants are the main protagonists of the short stories, who embody the virtues of their ancestors and are attached to their soil. Another group of peasant characters are those who are situated in the USA.<sup>277</sup> They are unable to readjust to their new environment and as a result they conjure up life in the homeland with a deep longing. Vahé Hayg<sup>278</sup> and Peniamin Nourigian<sup>279</sup> are writers who can be identified as followers of this trend.

<sup>273</sup> On this subject see "Un Tentative de Communauté Littéraire : La Revue *Menk*", K. Baladian, "Revue du Monde Arménien Moderne et Contemporain", tome 2, Société des Etudes Arméniennes, Paris, 1995-1996 ; *Parizi Menkin Deghé Spyurkahay Kragan Mamouli Badmoutian Mech* [Parisian *Menk*'s Place in the History of Diasporan Armenian Printed Press], Bebo Simonian, *Haygazian Hayakidagan Hantes* [Haygazian Armenological Review], pp. 209-226, Beirut, 1992.

<sup>274</sup> See "Writers of Disaster", Marc Nichanian, vol. I (The National Revolution), London: Gomidas Institute, p. 7, 2002.

<sup>275</sup> The former refers to the Syrian deserts, where like many other deportees they were forced to march, and the latter refers to the loss of their parents.

<sup>276</sup> For the evaluation of Hamasdegh's works see Hamasdegh, K. Shahinian, Beirut, 1961; *Hamasdeghi Ashkharhé* [The World of Hamasdegh], S. Gourdigian, *Sovedagan Kraganoutyun* [Soviet Literature], no. 6, pp. 104-114, Yerevan, 1985; *Hamasdeghi Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné* [The Works of Hamasdegh], Markarida Khachadrian, Yerevan: Asoghig Publication, 2004.

<sup>277</sup> On this subject see *Amerigahay Iraganoutyuné Hamasdeghi Esdeghdzakordzoutyuneroum* [The American-Armenian Reality in the Works of Hamasdegh], Markarid Khachadrian, in *Kraganakidagan Yev Panasiragan Ousounnasiroutyunner* [Literary Critical and Philological Studies], V. Giragosian (edit.), Yerevan: Publication of Moughni, 2004.

<sup>278</sup> On Vahé Hayg's works see *Vahé Hayg*, H. Krikorian, *Sovedagan Kraganoutyun*, no. 9, pp. 127-134, Yerevan, 1959; *Vahé Hayg*, Sh. Dadourian, *Sovedagan Kraganoutyun*, no. 3, pp. 108-113, Yerevan, 1966.

<sup>279</sup> For the evaluation of Peniamin Nourigian's works see *Peniamin Nourigian*, P. Selian, *Sovedagan Kraganoutyun*, no. 1, pp. 183-185, Yerevan, 1958; *Peniamin Nourigian*, Sh. Dadourian, *Sovedagan*

Secondly, the new generation of writers had to face and respond to the reality of exile and its negative impact on the preservation of Armenian identity. Shahan Shahnour's<sup>280</sup> (1903-1974) *Nahanché Arants Yerki* [Retreat without Song] (1929, Paris) was an archetypal example of this trend. It is the story of a young Armenian driven from his native Constantinople to Paris who falls into a quagmire of decadence, the kind any big city can offer. He was enchanted by Nenette, a conniving French woman, and as a result of this relationship Bedros (the Armenian version of "Peter") becomes Pierre, thereby becoming alienated from his identity. This novel generated vociferous uproar and a barrage of criticism for its defeatist attitude. Hrach Zartarian (1892-1986) raised the same concern through his writings, but prompted less controversy.

The third trend was the experimental route which followed Nigoghos Sarafian.<sup>281</sup> In his seminal book of poems *Anchrbedi Mé Kravoumé* [The Conquest of a Space] (1928, Paris) he heralds a new era for all Armenian poetry by breaking off from the past and beginning a journey into an unknown future. Had he looked back, as he metaphorically expresses it, he would have shared the fate of Lot's wife,<sup>282</sup> when against the angels' order she could not resist the desire to turn her face to see the burning Gomorrah for the last time, and turned into pillar of salt. In this sense he set his task as looking forward to conquer new intellectual spaces.

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*Kraganoutyun*, no. 12, pp. 97-105, Yerevan, 1974; *Hadndir* [Selected Works], K. Shahinian, pp. 77-85, Beirut, 1962.

<sup>280</sup> On Shahan Shahnour see *Aroghchni Ou Vadaroghché Shahan Shahnouri Kraganoutian Mech* [Healthy and Unhealthy Aspects of Shahan Shahnour's Writing], A. Chobanian, *Anahid*, no. 1-2, pp. 79-93, Paris, 1939; *Gensakroutyun Yev Madenakidoutyun Shahan Shahnouri* [Biography and Bibliography of Shahan Shahnour], Antelias, 1981; *Shahan Shahnour: Aksor Yev Arvesd* [Shahan Shahnour: Exile and Art], Antelias, 1985; *Shahnourian Entertsoumner* [Readings from Shahnour], Beirut, 1983 (this and the two preceding works were authored by Krikor Shahinian); "The Retreat of Shahan Shahnour", Marc Nichanian, "Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies", vol. 4, pp. 53-76, Dearborn, 1988-1989.

<sup>281</sup> For Sarafian's works see *Hed-Kroutyun Mé Nigoghos Sarafiani Hamar* [A Postscript to Nigoghos Sarafian], H. K., in *Chapadzó Yerger* [Works of Verse], Nigoghos Sarafian, pp. 475-507, Antelias, 1982; *Dram* [Drama], Krikor Bldian, pp. 357-483, Beirut, 1980.

<sup>282</sup> See Bible, book of Genesis, chapter 19, verses 23-26.

## Chapter Four

### Different Faces of Literature

#### The role of literature

In the post-Genocide Armenian dispersion, a reassessment of art in general and of literature in particular was made in the context of the new socio-political situation. As a result a distinctive perception of literature was shaped, which corresponded to the particular situation of the newly conceptualised diaspora. According to this perception, literature had a utilitarian role to play for a “nation” which was under threat of losing all grip on its identity. All the intellectual and emotional efforts should be channelled towards the maintenance of a “national” identity based on a distinct culture that was in even greater danger of erasure than ever. In the early years of the post-Genocide diaspora the literary journals adopted diverse approaches on this matter, all of them unequivocally emphasising the involvement of literature in the new socio-political reality.

Literature had to interact with the daily life of refugees and therefore it became a multi-functional enterprise which acted in a wide range of roles from the political to the educational. This Sartrean concept of the *littérature engagée*<sup>283</sup> had been an established trend both in the Eastern and Western Armenian literary traditions since the emergence of the modern phase of Armenian literature in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the form of Realist literature. If Armenian history was a chain of unfortunate events, then literature had to act as a countermeasure in order to minimise the effects of its devastating trail. This counter-reactive relation between history and literature dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter Three). In the absence of a political framework, literature was one of the institutions which preserved and forged the Armenian identity, the other being religion. The institutionalisation of literature in some instances shifted its prime goal from being the vehicle of exposure of beauty to being the vehicle of dissemination of socio-political ideas – in other words, aesthetics were compromised for the sake of politics. This approach towards literature was

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<sup>283</sup> See “What is Literature?”, Jean-Paul Sartre, translated by Bernard Frechtman, London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

well entrenched in the collective creative consciousness in Armenian culture. Here I would like to expose the perception of the different roles of literature.

### *The educational role*

The view of the role of literature as an edifying factor to the people was most commonly held in literary circles. I briefly discussed this matter in the third chapter in the context of the beneficial effect of books and reading; here I would like to flesh out this point very briefly.

Again Levon Shant is the focal point of the debate. He underscores the role of books and of literature as a source of education on two levels, intellectual and emotional.<sup>284</sup> First of all, on the intellectual level books are the repository of the human experience of life and the sciences. They can play the role of a school and they constantly shape the intellectual faculties of their readers. Books also purify the emotional world of humans because the interaction with literature reveals the human face of a human being and edifies and civilises people, destroying the inner “beast”,<sup>285</sup> and thus preventing humans from committing atrocities against other humans. Furthermore, it enhances human values, such as conscience, politeness, the sense of duty and the urge for justice.

Therefore, as well as being a useful tool for educating the common people, the other important role of literature is the humanisation of society, based on respect for others. Shant on this point implicitly refers to the atrocities which became part of the Armenian collective experience. Had the perpetrators of the crime destroyed their inner “beast”, Armenians would not have been victims of the worst atrocities of the new century.

Similar views were aired by the columnist of the journal *Baykar*, according to which Armenian literature has a dual role: it not only broadens our knowledge, but also enhances our emotional world, in the sense that it consolidates in refugees “the racial feeling, national spirit and ethnic character”.<sup>286</sup> As we see, here the edifying role of literature shifts the perspective. It focuses on the purification of the human character on “ethnic” grounds, rather than on civic grounds as was the case above. The enhancement of “ethnicity” was an important factor for the construction of the future diasporan identity.

In order to spread its influence and to assert its educational and edifying role, according to Shant, literature had to enlarge its scope; it had to involve as many readers as possible. He

<sup>284</sup> See Levon Shant, *Kirké Ousoum*, loc. cit.

<sup>285</sup> See Levon Shant, *Kirké Enger*, loc. cit.

<sup>286</sup> See M., Y. Lezou, *Kraganoutyun, Tseghayin Koyoutyun*, Part IV, loc. cit.

addressed this problem in his article<sup>287</sup> published in the newspaper of *Hayrenik*. He stressed the necessity of the inclusion of “society at large”<sup>288</sup> in literature. There was a discriminatory attitude against the common people from educated Armenians who regarded art and the sciences as the privilege of the few. While the diffusion of the habit of reading would bring to the attention of readers a set of issues concerning social, political, psychological and artistic issues, the arguments and the discussions which would be raised around these would enhance the knowledge of the common people. This interaction with artistic and scientific materials would form the intellectual making of the people. Therefore, to deprive them of the vital knowledge was a “great crime against civilisation”.<sup>289</sup>

Any form of social and political change or success, or any kind of positive development in society was contingent upon the inclusion of the common people. In this sense their intellectual preparedness was crucial, because “to wake them up”<sup>290</sup> was “to revolutionise”<sup>291</sup> their lives. Shant’s message was unequivocal: literature through popular education was an agent of the much-needed changes in diaspora, be that in social, political or artistic spheres.

A very utilitarian approach had been manifested in the earlier stage of the diaspora. In a questionnaire the periodical *Pyunig* posed a question on the issue of how life should be depicted in literature: according to the Romantic literary school or the Realist? Then the periodical asks the question: “Which school is more didactic and socially useful? In terms of edifying, ennobling and developing society, which school had played and can play the greater role in the life of human society?”<sup>292</sup> Evidently the main concern of the editorial board in this case was a more practical one: the possible choice of one of the two literary schools was not based on their aesthetic content but rather on the educational role that they can play. This was the utilitarian perception of the role of literature, which stemmed from a necessity to engage the readers in an instructive and beneficial literary activity. This would increase their social awareness and purify their personal characters, thus enhancing their chances of becoming part of the civilisation of humanity.

<sup>287</sup> See *Vorou Hamar é Kraganoutyuné* [For Whom is Literature], Levon Shant, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), no. 3685, 14<sup>th</sup> June, Boston, 1924.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> See *Kragan Tez Mé* [A Literary Thesis], editorial, *Pyunig*, no. 9, p. 1248, September, Boston, 1919.

The most utilitarian definition of literature came from the Athens-based periodical *Nor Knar*, which stated that “in the life of people literature has been one of the strongest factors which has buttressed their intellectual and physical education”.<sup>293</sup> The edifying effect of literature on the human intellectual faculty is well documented, but the physical side of the argument was a completely new perspective. The writer of the editorial has not spelt out how a literature could contribute to physical education or impact on the physical wellbeing of refugees in the diaspora. One possible explanation is that the emotional wellbeing of Armenians could positively impact on their physical wellbeing; therefore, emotional education was equally important.

### *The social role*

First and foremost literature was a social phenomenon. This was a repeated mantra in the critical circles of the diaspora. As one of the journals would state “where there is life, there will and should be Literature” [*yete ga giaynk mé, ga, ou bedké vor ella nayeve anor kraganoutyuné*].<sup>294</sup> This social dimension of literature had its precedent in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Realist tradition of Armenian literature, when literature was seen as a means of struggle against social injustice and for the alleviation of the suffering of the poor. In the diaspora situation the social aspect of literature had gained great significance; with a slight shift of emphasis it was adjusted to the new situation, because there were new causes to fight for.

Having this end in sight, Kourken Mkhitarian, one of the proponents of this trend, states that “literature is no longer an abstraction; it is a social and national phenomenon”.<sup>295</sup> He reiterates the same idea in a different article, which also completes the previous statement. He states that “literature as a social phenomenon is capable of development, and intrinsically linked to social evolution, to its unconscious or conscious desires, and the will. There is no doubt that the conscious is the most influential part of it”.<sup>296</sup> At this point it is important to underscore Mkhitarian’s stress on the nature of literature as a conscious activity. A similar idea on the social nature of literature was repeated three years later, this time in the Cairo-

<sup>293</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé* [Our Aim], editorial, *Nor Knar* [New Harp], editorial, no. 1, 14<sup>th</sup> February, Athens, 1926. It was beyond my means to identify the page, but with utmost probability it would be the first.

<sup>294</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé* [Our Aim], editorial, *Zartonk* [Revival], editorial, no. 1, p. 1, Cairo, 1919. It was beyond my means to identify the month of publication.

<sup>295</sup> See *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Bebk é Danil* [Literature Must Be Taken to the People], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 34, p. 528, 27<sup>th</sup> October, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>296</sup> See *Azkayin Kraganoutian Hartsé (Jshtoumner)* [The Issue of National Literature (Corrections)], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 50-52, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, p. 756, Cairo, 1924.

based newspaper *Housaper*, which broadens the parameters of literature by saying that “if literature by its expression is personal and individual, by its origin and development it is not only a public phenomenon, but also social and national”.<sup>297</sup>

Other journals emphasised the social nature of literature as well, the way it interacts with human life. According to the journal *Zartonk*, since literature is inherently linked to life, it plays a “certain role in the fate of nations”.<sup>298</sup> Andon Ghazel dwells upon the same idea that “literature has been the only means of reflecting the inner life of peoples and it has fully satisfied their spiritual needs”.<sup>299</sup> Zabel Yesayian states that “literature is the most straightforward and utmost expression of the happiness and pain, hope and inclinations of people”.<sup>300</sup>

All these ideas show that literature was seen as an indispensable part of life, which not only reflects it but shapes it. As such it is the ground on which a nation or group of people who share the same system of values can come together. The broadening of its framework by including all the segments of society would mean that corresponding literature should be cultivated, which would be accessible and would have a more practical function.

In this sense the periodical *Navasart* (New York) flatly announced that their publication had a “realist and utilitarian”<sup>301</sup> approach towards literature, therefore the cultivation of a literature which would be “enjoyable and understandable only to the writers and educated classes”<sup>302</sup> was not their priority. Instead, they committed themselves to the production of a literature which, although not “deprived of literary merits”,<sup>303</sup> would be “digestible [*marseli*], intelligible, and enjoyable, even for a person of average education and the unprofessional classes”.<sup>304</sup> Therefore, literary production needed to be matched to the “intellectual level”<sup>305</sup> of the readers. The editorial reiterated that this should not be done by “subjecting literary fine art to unnecessary crucifixion”.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>297</sup> See *Kir Yev Kraganoutyun* [Writing and Literature], editorial, *Housaper*, no. 173, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, Cairo, 1927. It should be noted that with the utmost probability the author of the editorial was none other than Kourken Mekhitarian himself, since he was one of the assistant editors of *Housaper* in this period.

<sup>298</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé*, *Zartonk*, loc. cit., p. 1.

<sup>299</sup> See *Kragan Estapetsoum*, [Literary Awakening], Andon Ghazel, *Adroushan*, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 2., Izmir, 1919.

<sup>300</sup> *Mer Oughoutyuné* [Our Direction], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 1, 4<sup>th</sup> October, Paris, 1925.

<sup>301</sup> See *Yergou Khosk* [Brief Words], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 1, p. 62, 1<sup>st</sup> January, New York, 1922.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

I would like to elaborate on some of the above-expressed arguments. If literature would serve social purposes, then being abstract was not the appropriate means of expression, since the majority of people would not understand it. In this case the accessibility of literature was crucial in order to secure the engagement of wider segments of society. This could only happen when literature was based on the “consciousness” – in other words literature should become the mirror of the developments and evolutions in society, which could be gripped by a “conscious” effort. The other intellectual or psychological exercises were not in demand. The explanation of this kind of position was straightforward: literature which would be produced in the diaspora had to expose the latest turbulent experiences of the refugees. The myth of the lost country had to be woven, and this would demand the vital intervention of mind. In order to eternalise the image of the lost country, it had to be exposed in literature. This could only materialise by the intervention of the mind in the shape of memories.

This was an attempt to retrieve literature from elitist domination by popularising it in order to create a new space of interaction which would bring together literature and the people. In order to make this happen the aesthetic expectations of the literary productions must be decreased, but without vandalising its basic principles. Therefore, the right balance needed to be struck between aesthetics and utilitarianism, but how to manage this balancing act the editorial of *Navasart* did not spell out. The crucial point is how on earth it would be possible to produce “digestible” literature without “crucifying” the literary text aesthetically. These were two incompatible activities. Any attempt at simplifying a literary text would diminish its literary value. The periodical *Nor Knar* in the editorial of the first issue set a similar aim “to popularise and make literature appealing, whose useful role no one can deny either in national or individual life”.<sup>307</sup> There was a repetitive demand for literature to be intrinsically linked to the life of Armenians in the lower echelons of society. Only this kind of approach to literature would serve the right purpose.

### *The political role*

The echo of the ongoing Armenian political upheavals and the changes at the time was heard in the literature. The short independence of Armenia (1918-1920) headed by the ARF party eventually conceded power to the Soviets in November 1920. In this independent and post-independent period the role of literature was defined in two different ways. The first

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<sup>307</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé*, (*Nor Knar*), loc. cit.



example comes from the period of independence, when in an editorial the periodical *Pyunig* (published in February 1920 just a few months before the end of independence in Armenia) claimed that the “slave people with their small numbers and political passivity can hardly maintain their independence of civilisation and culture”.<sup>308</sup> And the Armenians are one of those people who endured a long period of slave existence under foreign rule. During this period “the language and the literature of the Armenian race had been subject [...] to a detrimental and debasing influence, which had distorted our unique [Armenian] racial character and stamp”.<sup>309</sup>

Here the main idea is that political independence would create the conditions wherein independent Armenian thought would evolve. Therefore, future linguistic and literary activities were located in the political context. The necessity of a political framework which would secure a stable way of existence was beyond any doubt, because the survival of the “race” was very much dependent on the preservation of its unique traits. That can only be achieved in an environment where Armenians could determine their fate, which would be guarded from the distorting foreign influences. The Armenian identity would develop only in this kind of political space.

Levon Shant also discussed the link between political independence and literature in 1923. His approach reflected the political mood of the anti-Communist segment of diaspora in the post-independent period, which was marked by disillusionment caused by the Sovietisation of Armenia. During this period re-establishment of independence in Armenia was the first priority on the ARF political agenda. Shant also gives great importance to independence, which he considers the only guarantee of a healthy and normal society. In the absence of it, people would be economically, culturally and in their daily life dependent on the interest and whims of other nations. According to Shant, similar to the political and economic independence there is also spiritual independence. The former can materialise by establishing state infrastructures, the latter can only become a reality by mastering the language and literature. It is a natural aspiration of any vibrant society to achieve all these three goals, political, economic and cultural, which are interrelated.

The argument of Shant is clear: literature and language have the most crucial role, especially for the uprooted Armenian societies across the diaspora, where the lack of political structures accentuated the importance of a substitution. Therefore, by foregrounding them

<sup>308</sup> See *Hayasdanı Angakhoutyuné Yev Hay Mdkin Angakhoutyuné* [The Independence of Armenia and the Independence of Armenian Thought], editorial, *Pyunig*, no. 2, February, p. 1567, Boston, 1920.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

Shant underscores the role that they can play, because “the burgeoning of language and literature brings about the demand for political independence; the desire for political independence leads to the independence of language and literature”.<sup>310</sup> By serving literature and language Armenians will achieve “uniqueness”,<sup>311</sup> which will “pave the way towards independence”.<sup>312</sup>

The first point in Shant’s argument that catches one’s attention is the fact that independence is the result of the catalytic role of language and literature; the interaction between people and literature will secure a higher level of intellectual existence in the members of a given society, which will enhance their knowledge of the social, political, historical and aesthetic domains. This will open the door for a range of issues, such as questions about identity and its preservation. People will question the importance of the role of the Armenian way of life and propel them to bringing about the conditions within which the Armenian identity can burgeon. This interaction will also enhance the self-awareness of the people, their “national” pride and dignity. It will underline their “uniqueness” in the midst of other nationalities. This in its turn will lead to a thorough appraisal of the “national” history and culture in comparison with the achievements of other nations. The next step would probably be the political contextualisation of the relevant issues.

At this stage of high-level intellectual awareness people could resort to political action. The loss of the greater part of the homeland and the demise of independence in the small stretch of land called the Republic of Armenia had a huge impact on the Armenian psyche. To make matters worse, there was no working political framework and the means which would help the dreams of independence to materialise. In this vacuum literature assumes the role of guardian of the dreams of independence. Any dream before becoming a tangible reality exists in the form of ideas, and literature was the space where ideas would ferment. In this sense it could become a sanctuary for “national” ideologies, such as “national” independence. Therefore, in the post-independence diaspora of the 1920s the hopes of the realisation of independent Armenia were still alive, and the dream must be kept aflame for the generations to come.

For the periodical *Pyunig* intellectual independence and the blossoming of literature were the direct result of political independence. In the case of Shant literature was the catalyst of political independence. The consumption of literature would create a mindset which would

<sup>310</sup> See Levon Shant, *Kraganoutian Teré*, loc. cit.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

necessitate the emancipation of the people. Although the departure point of political emancipation is literature, it is also the finishing point. Therefore, literature is the raw material as well as the product; it is an interrelated cycle. For any possible achievement of independence the key to its success is cultural “uniqueness”, which would create the dividing line between “us” and “them”. In this context literature has the function of creating that “ethnic” space.

It is worth mentioning, as the case has always been in this kind of crisis situation, in the absence of a political framework literature and language were once more becoming the bedrock of survival. It is perhaps worth remembering here the creation of the Armenian alphabet as a means of ensuring the survival of the “nation” in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

### *The civilisational role*

The existence of art in general and literature in particular in any nation or society was proof of high spiritual and intellectual activity, which was the essential basis of human culture. One of the columnists of the periodical *Adroushan* Sarkis Jizmejian observes that “the richness and perfection of art is really the undeniable proof of maturity of the civilisation of a nation”.<sup>313</sup> What Jizmejian wants to say is that the high culture of any given society was indicative of a civilised existence, an important fact for small diasporan societies like the Armenians who were striving for survival, and the notion of becoming a civilised “nation”, and eventually the assumption of that role, would provide firm footholds to secure their existence. To be a “mature” “nation” would mean to face and overcome all challenges of history like other civilised nations do.

Literature was also seen, although not extensively, as an important means of interaction between civilisations. According to another article published in *Adroushan* “the role of literature is huge in the task of binding nations”,<sup>314</sup> because each literature is the reflection of the ethos and the psyche of the given nation, it also displays the developments and evolutions of the societies.

Therefore, as one can conclude literature exposes philosophical, psychological, intellectual and emotional maturity, in other words the cultural stature of nations. It enhances

<sup>313</sup> See Sarkis Jizmejian, *Menk Yev Arvesdé*, loc. cit., p. 42.

<sup>314</sup> See Andon Ghazel, *Kragan Estapetsoum*, loc. cit., p. 2.

the “mutual understanding”<sup>315</sup> between nations in general. Most importantly, it was viewed as the greatest expression of the civilisation; it was an image of the society that produced it. The reproduction of that image was the duty of each generation and this would determine the place of any given nation in the ranks of civilised nations. In this sense the periodical *Oshagan* underscores the role of the survivors in promoting literature among the new generation in order to engage them in the reproduction of the “ethnic” image, because literature “has a decisive role to play in the history of the civilisation of nations”.<sup>316</sup>

### *Literature as a means of survival*

In the literary criticism of the post-Genocide diaspora the most significant role of literature was attached to the idea of survival. As I have mentioned before, literature and language in times of crisis were the citadels where the Armenian identity was preserved and the post-Genocide era was no exception. Moreover, it was one of the crucial periods when the stable foothold of survival were acutely in demand, therefore the same notion of literature re-emerged in the early years of the formation of the post-Genocide diaspora.

The periodical *Zartonk* stated that during the turbulent periods of history when Armenians were in perilous situations literature has injected them with “the sweetness of a new will ... [and] ... new braveness”,<sup>317</sup> which led to their “reincarnation”.<sup>318</sup> This perpetuated their journey through the centuries, unlike other people or nations, who in such harsh historical circumstances were consigned to oblivion. A similar view was held by Hagop Oshagan,<sup>319</sup> who called literature the “sacred inheritance of our racial mission”,<sup>320</sup> which despite many catastrophes served as a bedrock of “our race”.<sup>321</sup> In the pain and happiness, in the struggles

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> See *Khmpakroutian Goghme* [From the Editorial Board], editorial, *Oshagan*, no. 1, p. 2, Paris, 1920.

<sup>317</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé (Zartonk)*, loc. cit, p. 1.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> For Oshagan's literary and critical works, see *Hagop Oshagan*, K. Mkhitarian, *Hayrenik* (monthly), no. 3 (27), pp. 84-89, Boston, 1948; *Hagop Oshagan Kragan Knnatad* [Hagop Oshagan as Literary Critic], M. Barsamian, *Antasdan* [Pasture], no. 12, pp. 113-118, Paris, 1961; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian (Hagop Oshagan Vgayoutyun)* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature (Hagop Oshagan, A Testimony)], H. Oshagan, vol. X, Antelias, 1982; *Mard*, Krikor Bldian, Antelias, 1997; “Hagop Oshagan: Critic”, Krikor Beledian, “Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies”, no. 3, pp. 129-145, Dearborn, 1987; *Hagop Oshagani Madenakidoutyun* [Bibliography of Hagop Oshagan], Marc Nichanian, Los Angeles, 1999; “Entre L'art et le Témoignage. Littératures Arméniennes au XX Siècle, vol. III- Le Roman de la Catastrophe”, Marc Nichanian, Genève : Metis Presses, 2008.

<sup>320</sup> *Kyughé* [The Village], Hagop Oshagan, *Arev*, no. 1687, 13<sup>th</sup> September, Part I, Cairo, 1924.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

and defeats literature has always been “the great and eternal song of the Armenian race”.<sup>322</sup> According to one columnist in the periodical *Zeytoun*, literature in a wider sense of the word was a “repository”<sup>323</sup> of all the cultural markers which would characterise the Armenianness, language, history, religion, music, archaeology and all sorts of ideas. In this sense literature was the most reliable companion during the journey of the Armenian people through the centuries. The abandonment of literature in the diaspora could have unforeseeable dangerous consequences; it could “degenerate Armenians as a race”.<sup>324</sup> For Tashian it was crucial to keep alight “the creative spirit”<sup>325</sup> of the Armenian literature which “comes to us from the centuries and goes to the centuries”<sup>326</sup> and as long as this continuity is secured “the hope and the light of the revival and reawakening cannot be extinguished; it cannot die”.<sup>327</sup> The perennial perception of literature, which always ignited the fire of survival, was a repetitive pattern in this discourse. Literature throughout history has been viewed as a buttress of Armenian identity. The secret of the survival of the Armenians as a “nation” was due to the very fact that the intellectual and spiritual institutions functioned as a buffer against the sinister occurrences of history.

Therefore, it was a generally held view that literature in Armenian culture had a special function throughout history; it was the bastion of the Armenian values upon which was built the whole myth of the survival of the Armenian people. In the grim diasporan situation the same idea resurfaced, more than at any time before the role of literature as saviour of the “nation” was needed. Hagop Sirouni observed that “our art is characterised by the instinctive strength of living [and] endurance”.<sup>328</sup>

Kourken Mkhitarian drew the same kind of parallels between the past and the present, he stated that literature has been the “most fortified front”<sup>329</sup> and “saving raft”<sup>330</sup> of the Armenian people, this was the case “in the stormy past”<sup>331</sup> and this will be the case in the present time “in the wake of the catastrophes”.<sup>332</sup> The Paris-based periodical *Arakadz* in an editorial also underscores the importance of literature in the efforts of survival. The writer

<sup>322</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé (Nor Sharzhoun)*, loc. cit., p. 2.

<sup>323</sup> See *Hay Kraganoutyuni* [The Armenian Literature], Deovlet, *Zeytoun*, no. 1-2, 1<sup>st</sup> January, p. 2, Paris, 1920.

<sup>324</sup> See Y. M., *Lezou, Kraganoutyun, Tseghayin Koyoutyun*, Part IV, loc. cit.

<sup>325</sup> See, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, P. Tashian, Part III, no. 12, 26<sup>th</sup> May, p. 179, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> See *Houné Kdnelou Hamar* [In Order to Find the Direction], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 7, May-June, p. 195, Bucharest, 1924.

<sup>329</sup> Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuni*, loc. cit., p. 7.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

states that “literature and the fine arts are the factors of self-preservation of the race and within them they have something encouraging and enthusiastic, which sometimes for the masses is as precious as a piece of bread or clothes to the needy refugee”.<sup>333</sup>

The approach of H. Nalpantian must be taken into account. He expounds the idea that if we treat literature “itself as pure art or as an aim, the issue becomes complicated and the analysis becomes intricate and impossible. But we will treat literature “as the most potent factor for the preservation of the race”.<sup>334</sup> In this case it becomes “highly useful”<sup>335</sup> and “interesting”.<sup>336</sup>

This was a forthright admission of a manipulative approach of the criticism towards literature for useful ends. The aesthetic evaluation of literature was not the priority either in literature or in literary criticism. Literature should be matched to the socio-political demands of the day, which led to the formation of the utilitarian approach. The root of this kind of approach could be traced in the discourses concerning the edifying and social role of literature. It would shape the intellectual and emotional sphere of the Armenians; therefore, it was a convenient tool in forging the Armenian identity. The survival was also linked to the notions of being a civilised and developed society; these were all seen as vital components for the perpetuation of the Armenian “race”; as Nalpantian observed “the impact of literature on the spiritual preparation and civilisation of a nation is undeniable and prevailing”.<sup>337</sup>

Kourken Mkhitarian dwelt upon the same idea, stating that “it is needless to emphasise the importance which represents literature in terms of the survival and the development of the race”.<sup>338</sup> He continued by claiming that literature is the most powerful tool in order to shape a certain approach around certain issues and bring people under one banner; this was designed to turn them into a “rampart against the flattening and deadly galloping of the time”.<sup>339</sup> According to him literature had a superior status compared to religion and the state, because only in literature is the “national physiognomy”<sup>340</sup> authentically exposed, which

<sup>333</sup> See *Yergou Khosk* [Brief Words], H. B., *Arakadz*, no. 1-2, 1-15<sup>th</sup> January, p. 1, Paris, 1926.

<sup>334</sup> See *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin* [The Direction of Armenian Literature], H. Nalpantian, *Nor Sharzhoum*, no. 3, 24<sup>th</sup> March, p. 41, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Hay Kraganoutyuné Yev Hasaragoutyuné*, loc. cit., p. 482.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

was the “greatest factor of national existence”.<sup>341</sup> For that reason literature was viewed as the “guardian Bible”<sup>342</sup> of the Armenian people.

I would now like to raise some points on a number of the relevant issues. To reiterate what has been said up to now, there was an historical role ascribed to Armenian literature insofar as it was intertwined with the fate of the Armenian people. It was a multi-functional enterprise, consolidating the ground of “ethnic” consciousness, which would serve as a barrier against any outside dangers. It would secure “ethnic” authenticity by guarding values which were the main components of the Armenian identity. Literature was also seen as a pliable tool, which could be adjusted to the socio-political demands of the day by becoming the platform for the non-aesthetic ideology. More importantly, the immediacy of literature was most appreciable as a direct link with the members of the wider community to convey messages, in order to manipulate or galvanise them.

### *Creative engagement as a means of survival*

The idea of survival was also linked to creative engagement, although it must be mentioned that the discussions on this theme were very limited. The first instance of the manifestation of this idea, according to my knowledge, was in the manifesto of *Mehian* back in 1914, which stated that “a race which wants to live has to create”.<sup>343</sup> In the post-Genocide period the same idea was reiterated with alarm. In the periodical *Adroushan* Sarkis Jizmejian expressed a similar idea. He asserted that if “the art is immortal then the nation or the creator of it is eternal and alive”,<sup>344</sup> therefore he links the perpetuity of the “nation” to the product of the creation, namely the art. In an editorial, *Nor Sharzhoum* claimed that peoples would perish if they did not expose their creative ability because it enables them “to defend their whole existence, which is not only physical”.<sup>345</sup>

The generally held view was that the existence of the “nation” was closely linked to the enactment of the creative faculty – to create meant to live and to exist eternally. The perception of the existence of a society was beyond being only carnal; it was emotional as

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> See *Mer Hankanagé* [Our Manifesto], *Mehian* [Pagan Temple], no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> January, p. 3, Constantinople, 1914.

<sup>344</sup> Sarkis Jizmejian, *Menk Yev Arvesdé*, loc. cit., p. 42.

<sup>345</sup> See *Mer Nbadagé* (*Nor Sharzhoum*), loc. cit., p. 1.

well as intellectual. The demise of the “nation” would occur if it ceased creative endeavour; it would turn into vegetative masses, deprived of dignified existence.

The periodical *Navasart* expounded a view akin to the previously expressed ones, but with a different emphasis. According to the writer, without the worship of beauty “peoples disappear and perish forever”<sup>346</sup> and he promises “to look for the ways which lead to the temple of beauty”.<sup>347</sup>

In this discourse the notion of literature, creative engagement and beauty were interconnected and had the same function, but with different faces. As we saw in this chapter, the multi-functionality of literature was designed to pursue certain non-aesthetic goals. Different strategies of survival must be put into practice and literature definitely was one of the most crucial elements of the success of that strategy and therefore its politicisation was inevitable as a response to the calamity.

In the case of *Navasart* there is an artful reconciliation between aesthetics and utilitarianism. Here, the two key words are “disappear” and “perish”, which link the maintenance of the “nation” to the idea of the eternity of art. It is a universally held view that beauty has paramount importance for the perpetuity of an art work. By linking the survival of humanity to beauty, the writer of *Navasart* accomplishes two goals: he does not vandalise the aesthetics of the art work at the expense of ideology; secondly, the writer asserts that the survival of humanity directly links to beauty. Nations would be erased from the face of the world if they did not embrace beauty, which is vital for human survival.

For the dejected Armenian masses in diaspora the quest for beauty apart from being a vital element for survival also had a cathartic role and would heal wounds. Such an approach was expressed in the Athens-based media outlet *Dedragner* [Notebooks], which recounts the aftermath of Genocide by saying “after the extensive destruction of the world war and after our unprecedented carnage, the surviving and living Armenians, who had sheltered on the foreign shores, are taking solace in literature”.<sup>348</sup> The writer likens literature to “the greatest mother”,<sup>349</sup> whose consolation is diffused to all Armenians who lost their mothers.

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<sup>346</sup> See *Nor Shrchani Mé Semin* [On the Threshold of a New Era], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 1, February-March, p. 1, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> See *Kragan Dakhdagner* [Literary Tablets], Levon Esajanian, *Dedragner* [Notebooks] (the literary, scientific and political supplement of the newspaper *Nor Or* [New Day]), no. 2, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, p. 1, Athens, 1927.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.



### *The therapeutic role*

Nshan Desdegyul was the main proponent of the strand of thought that argued for the therapeutic role of literature. It could be used as a vehicle in two different ways to remedy the emotional wounds of Armenians.

Firstly, he phrased the first trend as “literature of vengeance”,<sup>350</sup> which did not have negative connotations linking it to the promotion of any kind of retributive violence. On the contrary, he states, that while “political misfortunes”<sup>351</sup> would usually turn nations into “religious fanatics or zealots”<sup>352</sup> in the case of Armenians it turns them into a “more cultured”<sup>353</sup> people. This is because art has always been a “shelter”<sup>354</sup> to those suffering trauma. Therefore, in Desdegyul’s argument “vengeance” was an activity connected to the cultural sphere. But as a matter of fact the misfortunes did have a negative effect on Armenians, it increased nationalism, which was translated, as a natural reaction, into hatred towards the perpetrators of the crime. It also made Armenians more introvert and less interactive with contemporary ideas.

He tried to explain the abstruse process of the conversion of pain into a positive force, in an equally complicated manner. He stated that vengeance stemmed from a “deep psychological reality”<sup>355</sup> which took its shape from the disappointments of Armenian people, the massacres that took place in the past and the recent tragic events. The collective memory of the Armenian people was dominated by horror, and any attempt to dissipate the undesirable elements of that memory would backfire. The detrimental impact of the tragic events of the past would not only stain the memory of the people who had first-hand experience, but also the coming generations, who would read or hear about them. This would expose the new generations to the same traumatic experience, which would necessitate the urge “to satisfy their thirst for vengeance”.<sup>356</sup> Here comes literature as a spiritual solace, and according to Desdegyul this was designed to save the soul of the Armenian people, otherwise the future generation would be psychologically flawed.

<sup>350</sup> See *Mer Kragamoutyné (Ourvakdzér)* [Our Literature (Outlines)], Nshan Desdegyul, *Navasart*, no. 4, April, p. 252, New York, 1922.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

A couple of aspects of this argument need to be underlined. First of all, the response to the catastrophic events of 1915 must be cultural; this was what civilised societies would do. Resorting to radicalism would fetter the creative drive of the Armenian writers, something which was regarded as a lifeline to the chances of survival. This stance was irreconcilable with the ideas of some critics (see Chapter Six), who advocated the rekindling of nationalism as a means of maintaining Armenian identity. Another point is that future generations through the narrative surrounding the Genocide will relive the horrors as second-hand experience, owing to which there is an urgent need to channel their trauma and anger towards literature. This healing process would only be “vengeance”, which would bring intellectual and emotional relief.

The second proposition propounded by Desdegyul was the imperative of the evocation of the lost homeland. He urged the writers and editors of the literary periodicals published in the diasporan communities “to recreate Armenia”.<sup>357</sup> He stated that the trauma and disillusionment caused by the political failures had a great impact on the dejected refugees, who were firmly attached to their homeland. Therefore the recreation of Armenia through literature will not only relieve their longing for the homeland, but it will be an “antidote”<sup>358</sup> [*teghtap*] (“solace” is another translation) for all misfortunes of the Armenians, thus strengthening their resolve, which will facilitate their survival. In this context the writers had to take the initiative in order “to save the spirit of Armenians”<sup>359</sup> to give to the refugees “the vision of a free homeland”.<sup>360</sup>

The important points to be underscored concern the perception of Desdegyul on the function of literature. Literature is the vehicle which brings solace to the masses. Here the most important point is that re-creating the image of Armenia serves as an “antidote” for dejected Armenians. Literature is also the space where the lost can be retrieved. In this sense as I mentioned above it has a political role as well: where the politics had failed, literature fills the gap of dashed hopes and unfulfilled expectations. On this imaginative level the recreations do not fade away; they exist as long as in the real world what was lost remains lost. It is also important for the writers to create the picture of a “free” Armenia. The notion of “free” is connected to the future political activities within the parameters of the entity,

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

namely the homeland which is the object of the imagination. This in its turn entails the idea of return and underscores the temporariness of the current refugee state.

In both propositions literature has a therapeutic function, serving to channel the frustration of the past and the present into creative endeavour, thus transforming Armenians into a civilised society and keeping radicalism at bay. It alleviates the pain of the loss by proposing an alternative, the imaginary homeland. This healing process was equally important for the coming generations. Literature also serves as a stimulant of “national” consciousness, which would stiffen the will of the refugees, making them more resilient against the looming dangers of assimilation.

## Chapter Five

### Reconstruction of the Nation

#### Debates on the orientation of literature

In the early 1920s Armenian literature of diaspora was gathering momentum. At the same time critical debates began to bring to the fore a wide range of issues, such as the future direction of Armenian literature in the diaspora, the function of literature, its relation to the wider masses, the role of the writer, and other issues all discussed in the context of the new exilic existence of Armenians. The arena of these debates was the Cairo-based literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoum* [New Movement] (1923-1924). The debate raised therein was the third cycle of two earlier undertakings, namely *vaghvan kraganoutyuné* [literature of tomorrow] (1900) and *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* [literature of all Armenians] (1914). Therefore, it is vital to dedicate a chapter to the literary discourses which preceded the Genocide. This is for many reasons. In the period immediately after the Armistice from 1918 until the first half of the 1920s, when a literary critical framework for obvious reasons was absent in diaspora, the two major debates provided a working framework. It was a kind of repetition which also dovetailed neatly with the post-Genocide diaspora situation. The critical ideas and the aesthetics of these discourses with their nationalist content had resonance in the post-Genocide survival efforts. These discourses also had great influence on the critics and writers, which in some cases were the only critical frameworks that they knew.

#### The precedents

##### *Vaghvan kraganoutyuné*

The quest for new avenues for a future literary direction in Western Armenian literature in Constantinople was becoming a pressing issue even before Genocide. For that reason, the

newspaper *Masis* in collaboration with Ardashes Haroutyunian<sup>361</sup> (see Appendix) raised the issue of the future orientation of Western Armenian literature by publishing a questionnaire under the rubric of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné*<sup>362</sup> in 1900. It was addressed to the Armenian writers of Constantinople. In a brief introductory note Haroutyunian set the framework of the debate. He asserted that a literature can only be “truthful”<sup>363</sup> and “sincere”<sup>364</sup> when it reflects the past and the present of the “race”<sup>365</sup> [*tsegh*] by exposing its aesthetic and literary uniqueness. Then he put forward the four questions of the questionnaire. The first was whether Armenian writers believed that the Armenian “race” had the ability to create authentic Armenian literature (the writer uses the phrase *jeshmardabes hay kraganoutyun*,<sup>366</sup> which literally means “truly Armenian literature”). Haroutyunian did not spell out what constituted “authenticity”. He does not specify the criteria which would impart Armenianness to the literary works. I suppose what he terms “authentic” is literature which has the quintessential traits of the Armenian character.

The second question was whether Armenian literature in Constantinople corresponded to the above-given criterion, which was the exposition of the Armenian “ethnic” character in literature. If it did not, did Constantinople literature have the ability to generate that kind of literature?

The third question concerned the new direction and the nature of Armenian literature in Ottoman Turkey in general and Constantinople Armenian literature in particular, and what the writers thought of it. Did they think that it needed to be “inspired by a new tendency”?<sup>367</sup> If that was the case in future in what domain and how should “the innovation of literature”<sup>368</sup> (the phrase is *kragan pareshrchoum*, which literally means “literary betterment” or “amelioration”) be carried out? The main idea of the third point was what kind of stimulus Armenian literature in Ottoman Turkey needed for its composition and what

<sup>361</sup> For Ardashes Haroutyunian's work consult the following sources: *Ardashes Haroutyuniani Krakmatadagan Hayatskneré* [The Literary Critical Views of Ardashes Haroutyunian], L. Mnatsaganian, *Panper Yerevani Hamalsarani*, no. 3, pp. 191-199, Yerevan, 1974; *A. Haroutyuniani Boyezian* [The Poetry of A. Haroutyunian], V. Shamlan, *Lraper*, no. 6, pp. 24-34, Yerevan, 1977; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. IX, pp. 103-186, Antelias, 1980.

<sup>362</sup> See *Masis*, no. 26, 24<sup>th</sup> June, Constantinople, 1900.

<sup>363</sup> See *Hay Kragan Kmataadoutian Kresdomadya* [Anthology of Armenian Literary Criticism], H. S. Tamrazian (edit.), vol. 2, Yerevan: Publication of Yerevan University, p. 592, 1984.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., p. 593.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

kind of elements were needed for renovation. And what kind of expectation did the writers have from this kind of endeavour?

Finally, the writers were asked what they thought about the *kavaragan kraganoutyun* [rural literature] and whether it was capable of being the agent of the above-mentioned innovation. Did it have the advantage over the Constantinople Armenian literature in creating a literature, which would be characterised by its distinct Armenian “uniqueness”<sup>369</sup> and “inspiration”<sup>370</sup>? If this was the case, what would be the role of the Constantinople Armenian writers with regard to the “literature of tomorrow”?

As we see, the concept of “literature of tomorrow” takes centre stage in this discourse, and this for a number of reasons. Armenians were on the threshold of a new millennium (the debate was launched in 1900), which would bring new challenges. Therefore, like other domains of life literature was reassessing itself. Moreover, literature was an important tool in forging Armenian identity, therefore its future direction would be crucial in terms of determining the future of Armenians. Here also cannot be ruled out the political aspect of this idea, in the sense that literature in the form of ideas would shape the political aspirations of Armenians to yearn for a more dignified way of existence.

This questionnaire stirred a heated debate which engulfed scores of critics and periodicals beyond the boundaries of the newspaper *Masis*, such as *Pyuragn* [The Thousand Springs] and *Arevelk* [East] (both in Constantinople), *Pazmaveb* [Polyhistory] (Venice) and *Daraz* [Uniform] (Tiflis).

The debate brought to the surface the burning issues of Western Armenian literature, such as the nature of the Constantinople Armenian literature and its connection to the wider Armenian population of the Armenian provinces of Ottoman Turkey, especially the representational deficit of the rural Armenian life and its values in literature.

Many writers and critics, such as Arshag Alboyajian, Roupen Zartarian (for both writers see Appendix) and others, took the view that Western Armenian literature produced in Constantinople was the reflection of different aspects of urban life, and its content was more associated with themes which had universal significance, such as social injustice, exploitation of the working classes, the decadence of the upper classes, death and love with all its forms of expression. The missing element was rural life, which was also part of

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

Armenian way of life. There was a huge gap between literature and the hard life and the silent suffering of the rural people; their aspirations and hopes were ignored.

The criticism of the pro-rural critics was well founded since the space devoted to the depiction of rural life in Western Armenian literature was negligible. Only a handful of writers engaged in creative activities which took rural life as inspiration (viz. Karekin Servantsdians, Khrimian Hayrig (for both writers see Appendix) and a few others). This was part of a well-established trend, especially in Constantinople, which was the centre of the political, religious and financial power of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire was based in the Armenian provinces, it was marginalised and overlooked by the elite in the urban centres. The suffering of the Armenians by the hostile actions of wayward and corrupt Turkish officials and Kurdish chiefs fell on deaf ears, and not only when it came to the Turkish political elite but also the Armenian.

According to Ardashes Haroutyunian, at the core of the arguments was the issue of the environment in which the literary works were produced. If literature were the reflection of certain characteristics of the "race", which makes one literature different from the other, here the question follows, where was the natural environment which would best show the uniqueness of the Armenian character? He states that the Armenian way of life in Constantinople "was only a fake variant of European life".<sup>371</sup> The Armenian "ethnic" values were entrenched in the life of the Armenian provinces, and any future literary enterprise which would aspire to expose the distinct Armenian character had to use rural life as the reference point. What the literature of Constantinople was offering was the distorted reflection of Armenian life in a foreign mirror. Here we see the echo of two of the three principles of Taine, namely *race* and *milieu*, according to which the racial traits and the geographical environment conditions the character of the given artistic production.

Separate from the framework of the polemic of *Masis* newspaper, discussing the importance of *milieu* in the composition of the literary work, Arpiar Arpiarian<sup>372</sup> (see Appendix) reiterates the same idea that some Western Armenian writers like "Pashalian, Zohrab, Gamsaragan, Mir-Yero and Odian would capture and agitate the Armenian hearts

<sup>371</sup> See *Artsag Echer Yev Kertvadzner* [Prose Writings and Poems], Ardashes Haroutyunian, Paris: Publication of "The Friends of Martyr Writers", p. 131, 1937.

<sup>372</sup> On Arpiar Arpiarian see *Arpiar Arpiariané Kmatađ* [Arpiar Arpiarian as Critic], L. Mnatsaganian, *Panper Yerevani Hamalsarani*, no. 2, pp. 163-172, Yerevan, 1981; *Arpiar Arpiariané Kmatađ Yev Kraganoutian Badmapan* [Arpiar Arpiarian as Critic and Literary Historian], L. Mouradian, *Lraper*, no. 2, pp. 29-41, Yerevan, 1990; *Hamabadger Arevndahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 13-79, Jerusalem, 1952 (?), (1962).

and they would stir and influence the Armenian minds in a completely different way if they had the chance to transfer their art and social philosophy to Moush, Van and Yeriza'',<sup>373</sup> densely Armenian-populated towns in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. That is to say the creative production of these writers would have strong resonances if the ground of their literary experiments extended to the wider segments of Armenian society, especially into the Armenian provinces. Instead of casting their literary characters in "foreign moulds" they would have the opportunity to create uniquely Armenian characters.

Arshag Alboyajian reflects upon the "so-called contemporary Turkish Armenian literature,"<sup>374</sup> which cannot be Armenian literature as long as it represents a segment [...], Constantinople [Constantinople literature, KM] gives excerpts from foreign literature [emulates foreign literature, KM], therefore it conveys to the provinces alien taste, alien concept of classes and aesthetics [...] in this role Constantinople is unable [...] to generate an authentic Armenian literature''.<sup>375</sup> Although Alboyajian does not specify the identity of the source of the detrimental influence of foreign literature, the usual culprit in this discourse was French literature. Western Armenian writers had always been blamed for emulating French literary patterns in terms of conception and technique. It was true that Armenian culture from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was considerably influenced by French culture. Literature was one of the spheres which were influenced the most, both in prose and poetry. The classic example was the case of Krikor Zohrab<sup>376</sup> (see Appendix) who was a renowned prose writer, and many of his creative works were written in the form of *nouvelle* (short story). His creative techniques were influenced by Guy de Maupassant, who was one of the masters of this genre in French literature. Haroutyunian explicitly decries the literature of Constantinople as a "copy",<sup>377</sup> of French literature. He even goes so far as to claim that the Constantinople literature even fails to depict itself, namely the Armenian life in the capital.<sup>378</sup>

<sup>373</sup> As cited in *Hay Kraganakidoutian Badmoutyun* [History of Armenian Literary Criticism], Zh. A. Kalantarian, Yerevan: State University Publication, 1986, pp. 349-350. According to the same source the original citation is from *Panper Kraganoutian Yev Arvesdi* [Courier For Literature and Art], vol. 1, p. 179, St. Petesburg, 1903.

<sup>374</sup> By which he meant Armenian literature in Ottoman Turkey.

<sup>375</sup> As cited in *Ksanerort Tarasgapi Arevmdahay Kragan Kmataadoutyuné* [Western Armenian Literary Criticism of the Early Twentieth Century], L. H. Mnatsaganian, Yerevan: State University Publication, 1990, p. 26. For the original article see *Vaghvan Kraganoutyuné* [The Literature of Tomorrow], Arshag Alboyajian, *Masis*, no. 35, Constantinople, 1900.

<sup>376</sup> For the evaluation of Zohrab's literary production see *Krikor Zohrabi Arvesdé* [The Art of Krikor Zohrab], M. Hyusian, Yerevan, 1964; *Krikor Zohrab*, S. Shahbaz, Beirut, 1959; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. V, pp. 130-188, Jerusalem, 1952 (?), (1962).

<sup>377</sup> See Ardashes Haroutyunian, *Artsag Echer Yev Kertvadzner*, op.cit., p. 131.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.



At the other end of the argument Reteos Berberian (see Appendix) replied to the criticisms that were levelled against the literature of Constantinople of not being the authentic portrayal of Armenianness. He argued that the very fact there was a thriving Armenian life in the capital justified its presentation through literature. It was dissimilar from the one which was in the provinces, but it still represented a different way of Armenian living with different social dynamics and a separate set of moral values. Understandably this “would seem to the provincial brethren slightly strange and complicated, therefore it could look alien”.<sup>379</sup>

Therefore, there were two opposing evaluations of the Constantinople literature. First, the one which saw the inclusion of the rural life in the making of literature as a vital element of its Armenianisation and in that sense the Constantinople literature could not have representational status, but it could be a part of the whole of Armenian literature. On the other hand there was an already formed urban perception of literature which in a broader context had portrayed diverse modes of human life.

Ardashes Haroutyunian responded to the concerns raised by Reteos Berberian, according to which the adoption of rural life as subject matter would lead to the abandonment of the themes of universal significance. In an article<sup>380</sup> Haroutyunian asserted that the themes which had human resonance were not excluded from the framework of the “ethnic”<sup>381</sup> literature. There was a misconception about its role – the “ethnic” literature should not be reduced to folklore and the mere depiction of the mores of rural people. What made a literature “ethnic” were the materials from which the body of literature was constructed, that is to say the subject matter had to be a reflection of the ordinary life of rural people. Therefore, as we see in the choice of subject matter there was restriction on the writers, but in the mode of its cultivation there was complete freedom: each writer had the right to shape the raw material according to his/her socio-philosophical and aesthetic understanding and with the unlimited prowess of their creative talents.<sup>382</sup>

Haroutyunian reasserted that the current debate of the “literature of tomorrow” should not revolve around the idea of rivalry between Constantinople and the provinces; its aim was an attempt to enhance “self-knowledge” and to become an occasion of “self-reflection”,

<sup>379</sup> As cited in *Ksanerort Tarazgzi Arevmdahay Kragan Kmatadoutyuné*, L. H. Mnatsaganian, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>380</sup> For the original publication see *Kragan Khen tiré Yev Reteos Ef. Berberian* [The Literary Issue and Reteos Efendi Berberian], Ardashes Haroutyunian, *Masis*, no. 14, 7<sup>th</sup> April, Constantinople, 1901.

<sup>381</sup> See Artashes Haroutyunian, *Artsag Echer Yev Kertvadzner*, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133 and 135.

exempting any detrimental foreign influences.<sup>383</sup> Here Haroutyunian promotes introspective activity, by which the Armenian writers had to explore their identity. This would lead to the discovery of the “ethnic” roots of Western Armenian literature, which would rectify its “racial” features, because the authenticity of any literature exists in its “racial character”<sup>384</sup> (Haroutyunian uses the term *tseghaynoutyun*, which literally means “raciality”).

There are some points that need clarification. First of all, it is important to underscore the historical and political context of this debate. It was initiated in the wake of the Hamidian massacres of 1896, when the atrocities sent a chill down the spine of the collective “national” consciousness of the Armenians. The initiative of *Masis* newspaper was the literary response to the destruction of the collective “national” ego of the Armenians; it was an attempt to inflame the “national” consciousness and propagate a sense of belonging by encouraging the search and discovery of “ethnic” values, vital components for the construction of Armenian identity in Western Armenian literature. The only place that undistorted “ethnic” values could be found was in rural Armenia.

The morale of the provincial population was at its nadir. Therefore, by locating their plight at the centre of literature they showed their solidarity. This was the first instance of a collective effort of the people of letters to reach the Armenian population of the provinces. In a time of crisis once again literature assumed the role of saviour of the “nation”. It was not just an aesthetic preoccupation or undertaking but a cultural institution which would constantly forge and buttress the cultural identity of Armenians.

This debate brought under the spotlight the existence of two different modes of life with their deep divisions, one being the cosmopolitan life of the urban centres and the other being the simple life of the provinces. Each was governed by its own set of values and both were thirsty for literary exposure; to that end the exponents of the cultivation of pure “ethnic” literature accepted the rural life as the sole legitimate representative of Armenian “ethnic” values. For them the return to the roots would mean communicating with the ancestral values which were forged over thousands of years. On the other side of the argument some Constantinopolitan intellectuals were unyielding in their position of superiority, based on the argument that political, economic, religious, social and cultural power was centred in the metropolis. There was also a degree of indignation in the ranks of some provincial-born

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

Constantinople writers and intellectuals and this was their response towards the Armenian elites of the urban centres.

Another point is that at the turn of the century, at the height of the Hamidian political persecution, there was a nationwide suppression of any form of political activity, the sensitive censors of the government would silence any voice of dissent. In this context, in the absence of any political framework, literature became the playground for different ideas and literary enterprises/projects. The issues of “national” significance became part of the literary and critical undertakings. Compared to other intellectual activities it was safer ground, where it was easier to manipulate the realm of words and employ literary techniques such as allegories and symbols in order to conceal intentions.

In the 1900s Western Armenian literature was at the crossroads of generational change. There was a new breed of writers who were making their mark on the literary scene such as Roupén Sevag (1885), Taniel Varouzhán (1884), Hagop Kyuféjian (Oshagan, 1883), Kegham Parseghian (1883), Zabel Yesayian, Siamanto and Vahan Tekeyian (1878). The emergence of a discourse promoting a literature based on “ethnic” values would set a working framework within which the new generation had to make its contribution. The initiative of *Masis* did not include in their enterprise the indoctrination of the young writers to adopt their views and postures as its immediate concern, but the fact that a similar debate was propagated by writers around a decade later is proof of the importance of the issue, which I will discuss in the next part of this chapter.

These issues occupied the minds of the Constantinople writers until they resurfaced 14 years later in 1914 in the form of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* [literature of all Armenians], which marked the next phase of the debate.

### **Mehian<sup>385</sup> and ethnic literature**

The next phase of the discourse of the “ethnic” nature and the orientation of Western Armenian literature once more came under the spotlight by the publication of the monthly *Mehian*<sup>386</sup> [Pagan Temple] in 1914 in Constantinople (7 issues; the publication was ceased

<sup>385</sup> On *Mehian* see “Entre L’Art et le Témoignage: Littératures Arméniennes au XXe Siècle, vol. II, Le Deuil de la Philologie”, Marc Nichanian, Genève: Metis Presses, 2007; “Nietzsche in Armenian Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century”, Marc Nichanian, in “Deviation: Anthology of Contemporary Armenian Literature”, Vahan Ishkhanian and Violet Grigoryan (eds.), pp. 272-295, Yerevan: Inkagir Literary Club, 2008.

<sup>386</sup> It was published and financed by Gosdan Zarian.

by the outbreak of the First World War), by a group of young writers, Taniel Varouzhan,<sup>387</sup> Hagop Kyufejian (Oshagan),<sup>388</sup> Aharon, Gosdan Zarian<sup>389</sup> and Kegham Parseghian.<sup>390</sup> The publication<sup>391</sup> of the journal marked a turning point in Western Armenian literature. By Armenian standards it was an avant-garde undertaking which injected much-needed fresh blood in terms of becoming the playground for numerous innovative ideas and new approaches. It was also unique in its innovation, controversial views and bold criticism. The most “notorious” section of the monthly was “*hartenk*” [let’s flatten], where writers and works of questionable literary merits were severely criticised, sometimes with excessive ardour.

The objectives of *Mehian* were elucidated in the boastful manifesto which was signed by the writers mentioned above. From the outset they set the tone for their novel undertaking which encapsulated their literary credo. The manifesto poses a set of rhetorical questions, which was intended to identify “the veiled objective”<sup>392</sup> that Armenian artists were heading for. It was a typical introduction like that seen in any other manifesto, which would be followed by the presentation of pretentiously novel literary premises. The manifesto focused on four aspects of Armenian literary activities

- a) The Worship of and the Exposure of the Armenian Soul;
- b) Originality and Individuality in Form;
- c) The Cultivation of the Armenian Language with a Revitalising Graft;
- d) To exclude Politics and Journalism from Literature.<sup>393</sup>

<sup>387</sup> On Varouzhan see *Taniel Varouzhan*, H. Sirouni, Bucharest, 1940; *Taniel Varouzhani Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné* [The Works of Taniel Varouzhan], V. Kaprielian, Yerevan, 1982; *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. VI, pp. 184-244, Beirut, 1968; *Hadndir*, K. Shahinian, pp. 93-100, Beirut, 1962; *Echer Arevmdahay Mdadzoumen* [Pages from Western Armenian Thought], Seta Barsoumian-Dadoyian, pp. 183-217, Beirut, 1987; *Gragé Sherchanagé Taniel Varouzhani Shourch* [The Fiery Circle Around Taniel Varouzhan], Krikor Bldian, Beirut, 1988.

<sup>388</sup> He adopted the pseudonym Oshagan after the War. In order to avoid any confusion for the rest of this thesis I will refer to him by this.

<sup>389</sup> Consult the following sources “Constant Zarian-Triple Exile”, Lawrence Durrell, “The Armenian Review”, vol. 13, no. 4-52, Winter, February, (reprinted from “The Poetry Review”, Jan.-Feb., 1952) Boston, 1961; *Gosdan Zariani Shourch (Ousoummasiroutyun)* [Issues Around Gosdan Zarian (A Study)], Vartan Madteosian, Antelias, 1998.

<sup>390</sup> On Parseghian see *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian*, Hagop Oshagan, vol. VII, pp. 395-432, Antelias, 1979.

<sup>391</sup> All the citations from *Mehian* will refer to the facsimile publication of Aleppo presumably in the second half of the 1990s (no exact date is mentioned).

<sup>392</sup> See *Mer Hankanagé*, loc. cit., p. 1.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

For my purposes I will focus on the first two points. I have chosen not to dwell upon the last two points for three reasons. Firstly, it is important to discuss the issues which have a great degree of relevance in the later discourses in this thesis. In this sense, although the language is important per se in the construction of Armenian cultural identity, in the literary criticism of the 1920s it was not the most important issue. The central issue was the importance of literature as a means of constructing Armenian cultural identity and not the innovation of the Armenian language. Secondly, in the last point of the *Mehian* manifesto there is a clear demarcation on one side between politics and journalism, and literature on the other. As I have discussed these issues in Chapters One and Two, it is true that politics has always played a role in Armenian literature, especially in the post-Genocide period. I also briefly touched on the Armenian journalistic tradition in Constantinople (see Chapters One and Two). Since I have treated these issues it would be repetition to discuss it again. And finally, the inclusion of the last two points would be an unnecessary digression and therefore weaken the main body of the writing.

*Worship of the "Armenian soul"*

The first point of the manifesto, namely the claim of the worship of the "Armenian Soul" gives it a religious status. The worship [*bashdamounk*]<sup>394</sup> is connected to the spiritual world and is directed to an almighty existence to which is usually attributed a set of merits. Of these, the primary one is the power to generate life, which is linked to the idea of creativity. This brings about great reverence and devotion among worshippers towards the power which is behind the creation. Therefore, it is the duty of each worshipper to be engaged in spiritual activity, which would mean to embark on a journey in order to experience that spiritual existence and to reveal its secrets. In this sense the relationship between the Armenian soul (the spiritual power) and the Armenian artist (worshipper) was in line with the above-elaborated pattern of spiritual activity. The Armenian artist had to worship the "Armenian Soul" because it was the source of creative inspiration.

The attributes of the Armenian soul are the "Light", "Power" and "Life",<sup>395</sup> all related to religious ideas and symbols, especially in the pagan religion. They formed the golden

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

triangle upon which the whole of pagan culture and aesthetics were based, and they were worshiped as such, each incarnated in a deity.

This was also the time when pagan values resurfaced in Western Armenian literature and gained currency. Taniel Varouzhan (see Appendix) was the strongest advocate of this movement, so much so that one of his collections of poetry was entitled *Hetanos Yerker* [Pagan Songs] (Constantinople, 1912), in which he glorifies pagan values.<sup>396</sup> The very name of the periodical *Mehian* was the Armenian word for “pagan temple”. Another periodical *Navasart*<sup>397</sup> published by Hagop Sirouni and Taniel Varouzhan in 1914 in Constantinople (almanac, 1 issue) also had pagan connotations. By the ancient Armenian calendar Navasart was the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the year, which corresponds to the month of August and the beginning of a new year. It was the sacred month of the Armenian pagan calendar, which was dedicated to the worship of deities. Pilgrimages would be organised to the religious centres of Armenia, such as Pakavan. Competitions would also be organised during which the Armenian nobility would demonstrate their various military skills.<sup>398</sup> *Navasart* as one would infer also promoted the values of pagan culture.<sup>399</sup>

The emergence of the cult of pagan values and the adoption of the ancient Armenian pantheon as a source of inspiration was closely linked to endeavours to enhance the Armenian literary identity in the 1910s. The cult of beauty and power, which were the core values in that discourse, became the main ingredients of the aesthetic philosophy of this current of thought. The evocation of the pagan culture first of all was a journey to the ancestral pre-Christian past, when undistorted Armenian values and character traits were assumed to have existed. It was the departure point of the Armenian literary genealogy as well, which found its expression in *koghtan yerker* [songs from Koghtn], the pagan oral tradition. These myths were sung in ancient Armenia, which were dedicated to the deities and the heroism of the Armenian kings.<sup>400</sup> The fragments of this literature<sup>401</sup> which survived became the source of material and inspiration for the writers of this epoch, such as Taniel

<sup>396</sup> In this book one can find a poem entitled “The Light”; the analogy with the above-mentioned pagan idea of light is striking.

<sup>397</sup> The publication of *Navasart* (Bucharest) by Hagop Sirouni was the continuation of the publication of an almanac by the same name in Constantinople.

<sup>398</sup> It is worth mentioning that each summer the sporting affiliate of the ARF party Homenetmen organises sporting games called *Navasartian Khagher* [Navasartian Games] in the USA.

<sup>399</sup> The publication of *Navasart* was the result of a rift between Taniel Varouzhan and Gosdan Zarian over the issue of the cult of paganism. Zarian later distanced himself from pagan culture. See *Hetanosoutyun?* [Paganism?], Gosdan Zarian, *Mehian*, no. 5, pp. 65–67, 1<sup>st</sup> May, Constantinople, 1914.

<sup>400</sup> Koghtn was one of the Armenian provinces which in pagan times was famous for its oral literary traditions. It was also famed for its rich musical traditions of troubadours.

<sup>401</sup> Much of it was destroyed when Armenians converted to Christianity in 301.

Varouzhan. For example, his long poem *Harjé* [The Concubine]<sup>402</sup> was the glorification of the pagan way of life. In this sense the values of the past would provide a strong basis for the cultivation of a literature which bore distinct “ethnic” cultural markers.

In this context “Armenian Soul”, as termed by the signatories, was the time capsule which would signify all the “ethnic” cultural values; it was the embodiment of all “racial” qualities and gave shape to what would be called in this discourse the “racial genius”.<sup>403</sup> It revealed itself intermittently and abruptly along the centuries through the *Koghtan yerker* and the medieval Armenian poetry of Nahabed Kouchag (16<sup>th</sup> century), and this fact was the very proof of its existence. Without its intervention, any Armenian artistic production would be deprived of the right of Armenian artistic “citizenship” because, as we are reminded, “without Armenian Soul there is no Armenian literature or Armenian art”.<sup>404</sup>

At this juncture, the role of Armenian artists had paramount importance. The “Armenian Soul” was under the detrimental layers of so called “external factors”,<sup>405</sup> namely the “acquired customs”,<sup>406</sup> “alien influences”,<sup>407</sup> “debased feeling”,<sup>408</sup> and “deformation”,<sup>409</sup> which distorted its original features and hindered its exposure through creative production. Therefore, the intervention of the Armenian artist was obligatory in terms of re-discovering the “Armenian Soul” first in his/her inner self, and then giving a voice to it, because “each real artist exposes only the soul of his race”.<sup>410</sup>

It is worth noting the fact that the artistic parameters of an artist are well demarcated. The fact that being a “real artist” was conditioned by expressing “racial” features in a work of art was inherently linked to this discourse, which would have its bearing on similar debates later on.

The artistic undertaking of the Armenian artists in this framework would not only contribute to the exposure of the “Armenian Soul”, but would also make a contribution beyond the “ethnic” boundaries, since the “Armenian Soul” was “an element of the intellectual universe”,<sup>411</sup> and its “revelation [would] amaze pondering humanity”.<sup>412</sup>

<sup>402</sup> This long poem was included in the collection of *Hetanos Yerker*.

<sup>403</sup> *Mer Hankanagé*, loc. cit., p. 2.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*

First of all, *Mehian* accords to the “Armenian Soul” a cosmic significance, thus locating it in the wider context of universal values. It was a distinct Armenian voice in the harmonious polyphony of human thought. Another important point is that the artistic achievements on the “national” level of the artists within the above-mentioned framework would qualify their works of art as an achievement of humanity. In order to broaden their artistic and philosophical horizon Armenian artists need not embark on “Other” undertakings. The internationalist tendencies would not enhance the quality of their work of art; the only success would come by being distinctly “national”. The “Armenian Soul” was a small, but crucial piece of the jigsaw of a wider picture and “to expose that soul was the essential duty of each Armenian artist”,<sup>413</sup>

There is one further important point to be made and it concerns the unarticulated concept of “Armenian soul”. The manifesto does not define this concept clearly. What are its components and how is it palpably manifested in, say, *koghtan yerker*?

#### *Originality and individuality*

The second point of the manifesto concerns the external part of the “ethnically” charged content of literary works. In order to form the outcome of one’s inner exploration into a certain shape, the signatories of the manifesto claimed that Armenian artists had the obligation to be “original”,<sup>414</sup> and “individualistic”,<sup>415</sup> therefore they emphatically reject all “*a priori*-given moulded forms”,<sup>416</sup> of literary expression.

They emphasise their attachment to the basic principle of creativity, which is the “realisation of the inner self [*nerkin yes*, literally “the inner me”] by an intuitive mode of creativity”.<sup>417</sup> In other words, for them creativity was a process of inner exploration, expressed by creative spontaneity. The signatories also solemnly come to announce the fusion of the “Armenian Soul” to their individual souls, thus bringing about a strong creative current. The inclusion of the “Armenian Soul” within their creative framework will enhance the role of the Armenian characteristics of their artistic production. This potent current “will pass through all forms [literary], according to the sensibilities and inner

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.



rhythm’’<sup>418</sup> of each and every individual artist. That is to say that each of them will adopt the forms which will dovetail neatly to their own intellectual and psychological making. The fusion of the two souls (Armenian and individual) will also put the Armenian writer into a position where the traditional means of expression will be the natural creative demand.

In this sense they still ‘‘preferred the tools of expression’’<sup>419</sup> and ‘‘all authentic forms’’<sup>420</sup> (literary forms) that bore the hallmark of the ‘‘Armenian Soul’’ and which were employed in the ‘‘ethnic art and literature up to now’’.<sup>421</sup> Here once again the reader is compelled to ask what the ‘‘tools of expression’’ and the ‘‘authentic forms’’ were exactly. Were they traditional Armenian genres? If they bore the characteristics of the ‘‘Armenian soul’’, what kind of characteristics were they? The reader had to surmise that the ‘‘Armenian Soul’’ had to be cast in moulds which would correspond to the characteristics of ‘‘ethnic’’ creativity. Therefore, the signatories would not dare to experiment with other literary forms that lacked Armenian authenticity. This could include different literary genres, modes of expression and/or artistic currents of thought which would be incompatible with the traditionalist Armenian literary elements.

There were two contradictory aspects to this framework of arguments, which partly stemmed from a lack of elaboration of the ideas. First of all, they were on one hand declaring the emancipation from all ‘‘moulded forms’’<sup>422</sup> of artistic expression by promoting originality and individualism, while on the other they were embracing ‘‘authentic forms’’ within the Armenian literary traditions (although that choice would be according to their artistic taste). As I mentioned above, the manifesto does not articulate what ‘‘the authentic forms’’ are. They could be either the traditional Armenian literary genres, such as poetry, or certain traditional modes of literary expression. In this discourse ‘‘ethnic’’ values were the essential component of an artistic product; having this end in view it is sensible to suggest that the ‘‘moulded forms’’ were the ones which would be incompatible with traditional Armenian forms of expression, and would subsume under the category of ‘‘external factors’’ (see above), such as all foreign literary forms of expression. The other aspect was that the signatories of the manifesto were willingly fusing their soul with the ‘‘Armenian Soul’’. If the ‘‘Armenian Soul’’ was the embodiment of a set of values, then fusion with it would

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

coerce the writers to adopt given values. To some extent, therefore, the artists were giving away their individualistic independence, upon which the integrity of their creativity was based. Here the question is raised as to which these two was more dominant, the “Armenian Soul” or the “individual soul”? If the dominant side was the former, then this would diminish the significance of individuality and put the partnership between the two on an unequal basis. The realm of the “Armenian Soul” would spread not only into the intellectual but also the psychological sphere of the human existence of the artists, which was the main provider of the ingredients for all creative undertaking. The growth of individuality needed breathing space and it would reject all type of restrictions.

The prominence given to the “Armenian Soul” by a handful of writers in the periodical *Mehian*, to my mind, was far beyond being a mere literary enterprise. Historically it was expounded in a time when another round of massacres, this time in Adana (in 1909), had shocked Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. All happened after a year of delirious celebration after the adoption of the new Ottoman Constitution in 1908, which brought justice and equality to all citizens of Ottoman Turkey. In this sense the atmosphere within the Armenian communities in 1914 was charged with confusion and despair; the macabre memories of the massacres were still fresh. Therefore, any undertaking in the artistic domain designed to prop up the “national” morale of the people would be a welcome event. Here I have to emphasise that *Mehian*’s endeavour was not a direct reaction to this political situation, but the events of 1896 and 1909 were contributing factors (for instance, there was direct mention to them).<sup>423</sup>

In the fourth point of the manifesto the signatories rejected the idea of mingling politics with literature. As far as they were concerned there was a clear demarcation between politics and literary undertaking. The former serves an ideological end which aspires to power as a tool for change and the construction of society and the latter promotes beauty and intends to transform society. Therefore in theory the literary undertaking of *Mehian* had to be apart from the politics; conversely the signatories were becoming engaged in politics, although unwittingly, on aesthetic level. They set a framework for pursuing certain objectives and to bring about necessary changes. The “Armenian Soul” was the crucial agent of the creation of an “ethnically”-based credo which would contribute to the construction of the literary edifice according to certain values, which would be the touchstone of Armenianness for all works of art. If we locate this in the above-mentioned historical context, it will shed light on

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<sup>423</sup> See Kegham Parseghian, *Pazhagajar* [A Toast], Kegham Parseghian, *Mehian*, no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 34, Constantinople, 1914.

the circumstances within which this undertaking came into being. It stemmed from an evolving general trend in Western and Eastern Armenian societies, which were seeking firm footholds of “ethnic” identity and nourishing certain political aspirations. In this sense we can say that this was a literary-aesthetic response to the ongoing political fermentation.

The function of Armenian history as a buttress to the sustainability of Armenian identity at a time of “national” crisis was a phenomenon that should be highlighted. It was also a necessary tool for the continuous construction of cultural identity. From the time of Armenian Classicism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially during the Western Armenian cultural revival (known as *Zartonk*), which coincided with the introduction of the Romantic tradition in Armenian literature from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Constantinople an array of literary works was produced, such as poems, novels and plays, which took their subject matter from the historical past. The evocation of heroic events and historical figures would serve as a source of inspiration, without having special preference for any specific period in history, and was designed to shore up the “national” consciousness of the Armenians. In the Romantic tradition of Western Armenian literature aesthetic concerns were placed in the background; the priority was the message rather than the way in which it was transmitted. Their approach to history was utilitarian and used for the purposes of propaganda. In the case of *Mehian* Armenian history was also the main provider of the vital props of identity, but the way in which the messages were conveyed was equally important. For *Mehian* beauty had the same function as the patriotic messages of the heroes in Romantic literature. The aesthetic enhancement would only amplify the content of the message. Therefore, the aesthetics and the ideology occupied equal space in the foreground.

#### *Hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun*

The debate which was put forward in the newspaper *Masis*, namely *vaghvan kraganoutyuné* [literature of tomorrow], at the turn of the century had not come to its conclusion. Some of these issues remained relevant and needed to be addressed. Of these, “ethnic” authenticity and the future direction of Western Armenian literature still had currency.

The periodical *Mehian* once more tackled these issues by repackaging them under the rubric of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* [literature of all Armenians]. Unlike the previous one, the undertaking of *Mehian* had no intention of stirring a wide debate; it was an effort to

underline the issue. This was one of the reasons why it did not evolve into a fully fledged discourse. The third issue<sup>424</sup> of the periodical was completely dedicated to the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun*. There were two articles, one signed by Kegham Parseghian (see Appendix) and the other by Hagop Kyufejian (Oshagan), who elucidated the different aspects of their objectives. The literary section of the same issue also reflected the principles which were laid out by these critics.

*Hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* literally means the “literature of all Armenians”; more specifically it would mean a “literature which belongs to Armenians”. The parameters of this heading were wide, encompassing “all Armenians” under one literary umbrella. Now, what was the reason behind the choice of such a heading?

The previous polemic in 1900 (*vaghvan kraganoutyumé*) had negative consequences; it widened the gap between the polemicists of two sides of the argument, metropolitan and rural advocates. The proponents of the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* tried to show an unbiased attitude toward all segment of the Armenian “nation” and this was not only out of sensitivity but also based on their profound belief in the oneness of the “nation” in terms of literature. However both writers were critical of the prejudiced attitude of the Constantinople Armenians.<sup>425</sup>

“The concept of the “literature of all Armenians” covers equally all the segments of the Armenian race”,<sup>426</sup> states Hagop Oshagan. He continues his reflections by saying that under the camouflage of different dialects Armenians are united with the same bloodline. In this sense this undertaking belongs to each and every Armenian and its centrality is undisputed. According to him the realm of this all-inclusive project covers mainland Armenia, the Iranian province of Azerbaijan,<sup>427</sup> Constantinople and the Caucasus.<sup>428</sup> The first two were the Armenian-populated rural areas and the latter two the cultural centres of Armenians, West and East respectively.

Oshagan’s implication was clear: in literary terms *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* should be the ground where the different segments of Armenian people would meet and transform into a “nation”. Yet again the literature served political ends. Armenians in the above-mentioned regions were under the rule of different political systems and to unite them would mean

<sup>424</sup> See *Mehian*, no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> March, Constantinople, 1914.

<sup>425</sup> See *Hayasdaniayts Kraganoutyun*, Hagop Kyufejian [Oshagan], *Mehian*, no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 38, Constantinople, 1914. Kegham Parseghian *Pazhagajar*, loc. cit., p. 34.

<sup>426</sup> See Hagop Kyufejian [Oshagan], *Hayasdaniayts Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit., p. 38.

<sup>427</sup> In Armenian it is known as Adrbadagan, which is in northern Iran. It has a large Armenian population.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

facing the major regional powers. This was not possible politically but it could be achieved culturally.

*Hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was a literary venture, the spiritual successor of the *vaghvan kraganoutyuné*, which unlike its precursor aspired to redraw the literary map of Armenian literature not only geographically but also aesthetically. It was an open “invitation to the offspring of the race”<sup>429</sup> who shared common ground with the visions and principles of the group.

The main principles of the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* will be the next object of discussion. The third issue of the publication was opened with the article<sup>430</sup> by Kegham Parseghian, which was written within the parameters of the literary principles of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné* and according to the spirit of *Mehian*’s manifesto. He pays tribute to the efforts of his elder fellow writer Ardashes Haroutyunian, who brought up the subject concerning the fate of Western Armenian literature a decade earlier. First of all, Parseghian takes its cue from the first point of the manifesto and reiterates the need for the worship and exposure of the “Armenian Soul”, which re-emerges through the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* to reinvigorate the “pale [...] face”<sup>431</sup> of Armenian literature. Although “the evil heat waves”<sup>432</sup> [*charakordz khorshagé*] of history had destroyed all chance of the blossoming of Armenian creativity and had prevented casting spiritual and intellectual productions in the moulds of the “Armenian Soul”, it could not destroy the “Armenian Soul” itself. Its messianic role has been ignored by its own people and now was the time for re-appraisal – it had to be reclaimed and exposed. Therefore according to Parseghian there were a set of negative factors, either external or internal, which hindered the activities of the “Armenian Soul”.

In almost every appraisal of Armenian literature, the evocation of the misfortunes of Armenian people in history as a preventive factor of cultural development was made repeatedly in critical discourses. It was a well-established fact that the turbulent history of Armenians had a negative impact on the development of culture. There is no shortage of allusions to this matter in literary criticism, for instance in the manifesto of *Mehian* there are a number of metaphors signifying the tragic Armenian history as “plenty dark [...] images

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>430</sup> See Kegham Parseghian, *Pazhagajar*, loc. cit., pp. 33-34.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

from past'', 'enlightened by a sadly black cloud'' [Armenian history], and ''roads of Golgotha''.<sup>433</sup>

According to the exponents of this discourse, under foreign rule the collective worldview of Armenians was limited, turning them into a mass of slaves in their own country. I will cite two reasons for this situation, both originating in the same source. Firstly, it was laid in the Christian faith and teaching, especially the 'turn-the-other-cheek' mentality, which turned Armenians into a docile society pliable under the dominion of external (foreign rule) and internal (Church) forces. Secondly, this phenomenon had its deep roots again in religious belief, according to which the world has been governed by the will of the Almighty and therefore all misfortunes were regarded as God's punishment. This coupled with the eschatological view of the world led to the formation of a fatalistic worldview. This phenomenon was decried by critics like Oshagan, who denounced the existence of such a mindset by saying that ''we do not know to hate''<sup>434</sup>; he branded this shortcoming as a ''dreadful flaw''<sup>435</sup> in the Armenian character. The hatred in this case was a counteractive measure to the hostile outside world and at the same time a stimulant for the ''national'' consciousness. It was more self-defensive than aggressive.

This was the main reason the cult of the pre-Christian pagan culture had gained prominence, where one could find immaculate ''ethnic'' values such as bravery and nobility. This was implicitly suggested through the manifesto of *Mehian*. From this point of view the role of the ''Armenian Soul'' should also be evaluated. For the proponents of this discourse it was not only the embodiment of what stood for Armenianness, but it would also cleanse the layers of the impurity of centuries, which debased ''ethnic'' values.

Parseghian states that there are two agents which can expose the ''Armenian Soul''. Since it lives in each Armenian person it can be revealed through them ''everywhere'',<sup>436</sup> but it is mainly revealed through its ''primary source'',<sup>437</sup> which is the *pnashkharh* [literally ''real world''], namely provincial Armenia. Out of Armenia only the *kaghtavayrer* [literally ''places of emigrants/emigration''; the equivalent English word would be ''colonies''] could exist. Therefore he reserves primary status for the homeland as the natural habitat for Armenian literature. The fusion of these two agents (natural habitat and human) would be a

<sup>433</sup> See *Mer Hankanag *, loc. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>434</sup> *Hayasdamayts Kraganoutyun*, Hagop Kyufegian [Oshagan], loc. cit., p. 39.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> See Kegham Parseghian, *Pazhagajar*, loc. cit., p. 34.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

welcome event, since the natural habitat would impact on the human agent and would shape its spiritual and intellectual formation. This would make the human agent a more receptive instrument for the interaction with the so-called “Armenian Soul”. Having said that, he does not reject the works of art, whose creative endeavours lay outside accepted parameters. In the domain of art the geographical remoteness of the homeland would not diminish the Armenianness of the works of art as long as it exposed the “Armenian Soul”.

The writer recollects the uproar of the Constantinople writers during the debates of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné*, when the provincial literature was seen as a “segment”<sup>438</sup>, a voice like all other voices which had existed in Western Armenian literature. Parseghian emphatically asserts that “provincial” literature is none other than *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* itself and by equating the two he shifts once again the centre of gravity from *kaghtavayrer* (émigré settlements) to *pnashkharh* (provinces), as was the case with the undertaking of Ardashes Haroutyunian.

Kegham Parseghian delineates the two main objectives of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun*: it will be the “extensive and absolute”<sup>439</sup> expression of the “Armenian Soul”; and it will expose the “Armenian Soul” through “new and various forms”<sup>440</sup> of expression. Above I discussed the exposition of the “Armenian Soul”, here I would like to focus on the two epithets which describe the nature of the word “expression”. *Hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* is a wide, open field for literary exploration, it is “extensive” enough always to shed new light into dark corners of “ethnic” character and to discover new nuances in the collective psyche. This was the novelty of the task. It was the “absolute” framework for all writers who would be prepared to subscribe to it. Parseghian was claiming representational legitimacy. As far as he was concerned their enterprise was the only avenue which could lead the Armenian writers to the source from which sprang the “ethnic features of the *Armenian* [the writer’s italics] art and literature”.<sup>441</sup>

The next point is that the introduction of the “new and various forms” of expression was in line with the exhortation of the manifesto to be “peculiar” and “individualistic”, but unlike the manifesto there was no mention of the contradictory suggestion of adherence to the “authentic forms”. The relaxed attitude of Parseghian had much to do with innovative literary efforts of the time which intended to renovate Armenian literature, provided that

<sup>438</sup> See *Hay Kragan Knnatadoutian Kresdomadya*, vol. II, p. 593.

<sup>439</sup> See Kegham Parseghian, *Pazhagajar*, loc. cit., p 34.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

under any kind of external construction the substance would remain none other than the “Armenian Soul”.

Parseghian asserts that the instrument of the exposure of the “Armenian Soul” has been the “popular genius”,<sup>442</sup> namely all the forms of creative activity which designate the popular endeavour. In very few instances it has been exposed through the “individual genius”.<sup>443</sup> There are some points that need to be addressed. As I mentioned above, the common people was seen as the main vehicle for the exposition of the “ethnic” culture. People-based literature was the core of the argument in this discourse. Another point is that the crude cultural material at the popular level needed to be cultivated by the individual artists. In this sense the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was the literary framework where works of great value could be produced.

Oshagan dwells upon the idea of the individual genius as well, stating that the cradle of the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* resides within the common people and as such it is an authentic and valuable “expression of the Armenian race”.<sup>444</sup> But he also underlines the indispensability of having “strong personalities, the great [individuals] who synthesise the racial soul perfectly”.<sup>445</sup>

Here Oshagan brings under the spotlight the most important issue of this enterprise, the use of popular artistic traditions by people in the arts for broader artistic objectives. Any production of cultural value on the popular level had aesthetic significance and as such was considered part of the cultural heritage. This crude artistic material would be the vital ingredient of much large-scale artistic enterprise, which would draw a much bigger picture of the “racial” intellectual and spiritual state. From this point of view the crude material of popular culture needed the process of cultivation and purification. Such an undertaking was a task that should be fulfilled by individuals who were recipients of the crude elements of “ethnic” values, which s/he would be able to process into solid materials in order to build the edifice of quintessentially Armenian works of art.

Oshagan set the criterion which would validate the status of “greatness” of the individuals discussed above. He asserts that the individual could only be “great” when s/he serves as a “mirror”,<sup>446</sup> in which the other members of the “race” can see themselves

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Hagop Kyufejian [Oshagan], *Hayasdaniayts Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit., p. 38.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.



“without distorting facial features”,<sup>447</sup> and the future generations can identify themselves with their creative works on “ethnic” grounds, a fact which would seal their fate as a “great individual”.

Therefore, the “great individuals” are not defined by their geographical and historical location. They are trans-regional and encompass the diverse Armenian identities, and their influence expands over coming centuries. I discussed above Oshagan’s territorial concept of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* and here I would like to mention the linguistic aspect of the issue. The artistic creation of the “great individual” (in this case the writer) should be beyond the divisions imposed by the dialects, especially between Western and Eastern; s/he not only transcend all the sectarian boundaries but also prepares the ground upon which the all-inclusive literary identity would be constructed. In this sense Oshagan states that still “we wait for our Dante”<sup>448</sup> who would unite “our fragmented existence”.<sup>449</sup> The role of Dante in Italian literature was immense since his masterpiece “The Divine Comedy” had a significant impact on Italy’s “fragmented” society in the medieval period. Politically and linguistically Italy was divided between feudal families and different dialects. The language of the masterpiece became the standard literary language in Italy. The analogy between the Italian genius and the impact of his work and the Armenian genius to be born and his/her responsibilities are striking.

Most importantly, the “great individuals” in terms of time would stand between past and present. They are the product of the historical and cultural matrix of the previous centuries. As the bearers of all the cultural markers of the “race” they would filtrate all the cultural materials through their intellectual and spiritual reasoning in order to produce a work of art which would epitomise all the Armenian “ethnic” values. Thus they would link the past to the coming generations. This was a process of self-purification which had to be repeated once in a while.

Oshagan mentions the cases of some artists who dovetailed neatly into this criterion. Without naming them he very briefly assesses their input to Armenian culture, each one in his field of vocation respectively. It is not difficult to surmise their identity. The first group of the artists consists of the writers who cultivated the Armenian fairytales as a literary genre. Of these, the most renowned was a familiar name, Roupen Zartarian, who in similar circumstances was mentioned in the article of Kegham Parseghian. He cultivated numerous

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

Armenian folktales, thus bringing under the spotlight the popular creation of rural Armenians. Therefore he was closely linked to the rural life of Armenia. This fact won him immense credibility in the circles which advocated the promotion of "ethnic" cultural values. The second figure was the musician and musicologist Gomidas whose work in the musical domain remains unparalleled. He saved a significant part of Armenian folkloric music by wandering from village to village in rural Armenia and recording it. Moreover, he cultivated the compiled musical materials based on the traditional tunes of Armenian music by extracting all the tunes unfamiliar to the Armenian musical traditions and thus he purified and eliminated the "external factors" (see the manifesto above) in Armenian music. Therefore, in order to be the "mirror of the race" the artist had no choice but to interact with the people who were the source of the cultural production. In this sense *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was an "invitation to the fatherland",<sup>450</sup> where "the unknown elegies [and] the future epic",<sup>451</sup> of the people needed to be aestheticised. The allusion to these two genres is interesting, the former connected to suffering and despair, and the latter with connotations of heroism. This way, the creative fate of the artists was intrinsically linked to the fate of rural life, which consisted in narrating the painful experiences and heroic struggles of rural people.

In this context *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* had a political role to play as well, since "it should be the only [...] deity in the slave races like us",<sup>452</sup> which will consolidate the foundations of the "nation". As we see, there is the role of a saviour assigned by Oshagan to art in general and to literature in particular, which was considered the stable foothold to those who wanted to lay the foundation of the "nation", and this task only begins on the emotional and intellectual level, the two highest states of human consciousness. In this sense *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was a vital political framework and as such had to be kept as the "Ark of the Covenant",<sup>453</sup> of the Armenian people from the enemy "Philistines".<sup>454</sup> The allegory employed by Oshagan is thought-provoking. The "Ark of the Covenant" was a reference to the holiest portable Jewish shrine wherein the tablets of the Ten Commandments and other relevant sacred objects were kept. During the battles against the enemies such as Philistines, the arch rival of the Jewish people, there were mysterious powers assigned to it as

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

the guarantee of victory. It also had a key role in the formation of the Jewish “nation”. The analogy between the “Ark of the Covenant” and the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was one to which attention should be paid. The equation of the latter with the “Ark of the Covenant” makes it as holy as the Jewish sacred object. It contained the moral code of conduct (Ten Commandments), the guiding map of the ethos of the Jewish people, which would locate the single individual in a wider network of relations and bonds. In other words the “Ark of the Covenant” contained all the elements which would guarantee the transformation of the Jews from a loosely connected group of people into a more organised and bonded entity, in short, into a “nation”. *Hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* shared the same function as the Ark of the Covenant, but on the literary ground. Its Ten Commandments were the “ethnic” cultural values or the moral codes which would eventually be the building blocks in the construction of the “nation” through literature. Having such a symbolic significance, the Ark of the Covenant should be guarded from the “Philistines”,<sup>455</sup> the Gentiles, the main enemies of the Jewish people. Likewise, the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun*, the symbol of Armenian values, must be kept from the Gentiles, the detrimental influences, which would debase the Armenian “ethnic” values.

The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the tabernacle and it was a sacred site; exclusive access was only given to the priests. According to the biblical tradition, God would descend upon the tabernacle and the priests were the only ones who could communicate with the Almighty and they were the ones who would pass the godly messages to the Jewish people, thus bridging the spiritual and material worlds. Now who and where were the priests of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* who would convey the messages from the spiritual world to the most forgotten corners of the Armenian settlements. Who would not only be the custodian of the cultural values but also the shaper of them? Oshagan was acutely aware of the necessity of preparing the generation of “great individuals” or “priests” like Zartarian and Gomidas for the task which lay ahead. These people “were not made in and fallen from the sky”,<sup>456</sup> they were the result of an “utmost effort”,<sup>457</sup> therefore *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* in a sense was the anvil on which the future individuals would be forged. It was they who would fight the forthcoming battles against the “Philistines” and for that reason their emotional and intellectual making must be composed of “the finest and durable elements of the

<sup>455</sup> The Philistines were a biblical race who were in constant struggle with Jews over biblical territories.

<sup>456</sup> Hagop Kyufekjian [Oshagan], *Hayasdaniayts Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit., p. 38.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

fatherland”<sup>458</sup> No one but the writers would carve out the future fate of the Armenian people. In this crucial period of Armenian history, when the main goal of Armenians was a more respectable existence among the ranks of other nations, the shortage of these “great individuals” was very acute. As Oshagan concludes “what we lack are the labourers, race constructors, nation creators”<sup>459</sup> This was one of the first articulations in literary criticism of the aspiration for nation-building; it was already in a preparatory stage.

### **The situation on the ground**

As we have seen, the project of *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* conceived in Constantinople was a creative invitation towards *pnashkharh* (homeland), an untouched territory for artistic cultivation. But what could be the response and what were the chances of its success in the homeland itself? The article of Shavarsh Misakian commissioned by *Mehian* especially for this issue of the periodical was dedicated to the intellectual and creative state of *pnashkharh*. As a political activist and journalist based in Garin<sup>460</sup> Misakian had first-hand experience of the situation in the homeland. According to his account, as far as literature was concerned the situation was bleak. The dire socio-political situation in the homeland had precipitated the formation of a utilitarian approach to the outstanding issues, which meant that any literary framework including *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* was not the immediate answer to their problems; “the worship of Beauty and Form was in second place”<sup>461</sup> This lack of literary and intellectual activities had brought about homogeneity in aesthetic perceptions and taste.

According to Misakian the formation of this kind of bland taste in provincial Armenia had its reasons. Although traditionally the provinces were linked to the creative efforts of Constantinople, the literary production of the capital would be accepted with reserve and would be seen as verbal fireworks with a serious deficit of emotional substance. It was disconnected from the reality of the homeland and as such gave no scope to the concerns with which the new generation of provincial writers could identify themselves. I discussed the disregard that was shown to the provinces by the Constantinople elite and this was another contributing factor to the formation of such an attitude. Therefore the writers in the

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Garin was one of the densely Armenian-populated towns in Armenia.

<sup>461</sup> See *Hay Pnashkharhi Nor Serounté Arvesdi Yev Kraganoutian Hanteb* [The Armenian Homeland's New Generation on Art and Literature], Shavarsh Misakian, *Mehian*, no. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> March, p. 46, Constantinople, 1914.

provinces were not completely cut from the umbilical cord of Western Armenian literature and its developmental processes but neither were they a part of it completely. For this reason they were in a kind of limbo between the Constantinople literary traditions (at the same time in denial of it) and the urgent socio-political engagements in the provinces, oscillating “once this side and once the other”.<sup>462</sup> This emotional and intellectual instability would have a detrimental effect on their creativity by “distorting their features”,<sup>463</sup> which would produce “a handful of mediocrities”.<sup>464</sup>

*Mehian* was short-lived and the fate of the *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* came to an abrupt halt in the second half of 1914 due to the calamitous political events which shook the world, and particularly the Armenians, from 1915 onwards. The exact impact of *Mehian* on Armenian critical debates has not been explored fully, but it is clear that the discourse on the authenticity and the purification of Armenian literature which was launched by *Masis* and *Mehian* respectively found their new exponents in the diasporan situation. They reinterpreted the following credos under new political circumstances.

Before bringing this chapter to a conclusion I would like to make two points. Firstly, the frequency and the intensity of the usage of the terms “race” (*tsegh*) and “racial” (*tseghayin*) in the rhetoric of this discourse were designed to amplify the signification of the delivered message. In his three-page article Oshagan uses the terms around 26 times.<sup>465</sup> Secondly, the relation between *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* and “Armenian Soul” was not spelt out. One can surmise that the former was the framework while the latter within that framework was the driving force of creativity. It was also the very essence of literary productions; in other words it epitomised the Armenianness of literary works and was therefore guaranteed the preservation of these values in literature.

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> See Hagop Kyufejian [Oshagan], *Hayasdaniayts Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit., pp. 38-40.

## Chapter Six

### The Role of the Writers and the Future of Literature

#### Introduction

The debates on the future direction of Armenian literature and the role of the writers in diaspora began in earnest in the first half of the 1920s, and were centred on the literary periodical of *Nor Sharzhoun* published in Cairo (1923-1924). The two main protagonists of the polemic were Kourken Mkhitarian and Peniamin Tashian. Although the debate gained some currency, embraced by a handful of writers and critics which included Zabel Yesayian, Hagop Sirouni, it never became a fully fledged discourse. The Bucharest-based periodical *Navasart* (1923-1926) echoed issues raised in *Nor Sharzhoun* without being fully involved in the ongoing debates. Its editor Hagop Sirouni made his views known on different occasions through the pages of his periodical.

Four sets of issues occupied the minds of post-Genocide diasporan critics and writers. Firstly, exposition of the Armenian milieu was at the top of the literary critical agenda. Literature was perceived by critics as an important tool of change and as such it had a vital role to play in constructing Armenian cultural identity, which in its turn would buttress the “ethnic” survival of Armenians. Having this end in mind it was imperative that a literature that would talk about the experience of the people be written. Literature should serve as a “mirror”, the readership at the low level of society should identify with the given literary work in the scope of its interests and issues. As for the object of the depiction of popular life, there was intense debate between the nationalist and what I would call innovative critics. The nationalists advocated the depiction of the Armenian milieu, especially the rural life of the homeland, while on other side of the argument the young critics rejected this idea, claiming that writers do not have enough knowledge of the homeland and its way of life. In the diasporan communities, Armenian writers had to face a new situation.

Secondly, the proposal of the periodical *Nor Sharzhoun* with regard to the creation of an association of writers has been discussed above (see Chapter Three). It would coordinate the intellectual endeavours in the post-Genocide diaspora. Therefore there was already a debate

around the idea of a gathering of people of letters for certain objectives, of course not necessarily purely literary. When the debates around the future direction of Armenian literature gathered pace and the demand for the cultivation of “ethnic” literature took shape, the urgency of bringing the writers around certain literary principles became indispensable, a proposal whose purpose was threefold. The formulation of literary principles was utilitarian: if literature had an important role to play in society, then keeping it under control would allow for an Armenian identity to be engineered in diaspora, capable of confronting the challenges an exiled society might face. This was a manipulation of literature for the purposes of survival. Next, in order to develop a kind of literature that would act as a buffer between two systems of values – Armenian and non-Armenian – some guidelines had to be introduced to regulate the writers’ literary activities. This was an attempt to police literature in order to prohibit trespasses beyond the demarcated “ethnic” lines. And finally, its purpose was also to mobilise people of letters for causes which could have great significance in the context of post-Genocide diaspora, such as survival and maintaining the Armenian identity.

Thirdly, one of the issues which was discussed in *Nor Sharzhoum* was the creation of uniquely Armenian literature, in other words “ethnic literature” [*dohmig kraganoutyun*].<sup>466</sup> In Armenian the word *dohm* designates the group of people who relate to each other by blood line as well as by cultural markers, such as language and religion; the approximate translation in English would be “clan” or “tribe”. The nearest sociological term is “ethnic group”. The word *dohmig* is the adjectival addition to the word *kraganoutyun* [literature], which can be translated as “ethnic” to denote the cultural values of a distinct group, namely Armenians. It is also referred to as *hayetsi kraganoutyun*.<sup>467</sup> The word *hayetsi* means “Armenian” or “quintessentially Armenian”. These concepts incorporated all the “ethnic” elements which would make literature the “mirror” of any “nation” (see Chapter Five). It was an institution that contributed to the construction of Armenian identity and as such it has to get rid of “external factors” (see Chapter Five) by being the vehicle of exposition for exclusively Armenian “ethnic” values. This puritan view was the re-articulation of the literary discourses of the pre-Genocide Constantinople critics, and by the 1920s was ingrained in literary critical thought. The main factor which contributed to the formation of this kind of view was Genocide, which halted the normal development of literature in the

<sup>466</sup> See *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Hed* [The Literature with the People], P. Tashian, *Nor Sharzhoum*, no. 35, 3<sup>rd</sup> November, p. 542, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541.

Western Armenian language. Literature became a vehicle of multi-purpose enterprise diverting from its main purpose, which is the exposition of beauty.

Fourthly, the debates on the creation of a uniquely Armenian literature led the protagonists to the most important issue: where is the homeland, the main provider of the ingredients for a uniquely Armenian literature? In other words the cultural habitat was missing with all its forms of different cultural manifestations. This would serve as a base upon which would be laid the foundation of post-Genocide Armenian literature out of the boundaries of Soviet Armenia. The centrality of the homeland for any literary enterprise was vital in terms of authenticity. Literature that would burgeon outside homeland would lack the characteristics of Armenianness; therefore it would not represent the authentic face of Armenians.

The opinions on this issue were divided and there were three strands of critical thought. Some critics like Sirouni emphasised the essential centrality of the homeland in any future literary enterprises (later he changed his position). A number of critics insisted on the idea that homeland was not necessary for the creation of uniquely Armenian literature, but the memory of her was. Others advocated the idea of the permanence of the diasporan communities as firm grounds upon which would burgeon all aspects of Armenian life, including literature.

As far as the formation of the literary identity and the future direction of literature are concerned, these debates will give clear insight into the dynamics of critical thought in the aftermath of Genocide.

### ***Exposition of the Armenian milieu***

#### *Context*

The nationalist discourse of diasporan Armenian literary criticism was part of a global trend which engulfed many nations and societies from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the post-World War I period. From the ruins of war nation-states were created; of these the Turkish Republic came into being at the expense, as Armenians viewed it, of Armenian homeland and the victims of Genocide and with the complicity of Western political powers. This was also the age of colonialism, when the Third World experienced a surge in nationalist feeling, which they directed against the colonisers.



For comparison with the Armenian case I use the example of Arab nationalism for its similarity to Armenian nationalism. Both Arabs and Armenians lived in the Ottoman political, administrative and cultural system. In the constantly shifting political and economic landscape of the colonial period, the Ottoman Empire was on its last leg. Both Arabs and Armenians went through many crises and hardship, which were often perceived as Ottoman hegemony and injustice. However, this was a period of genuine exploration of alternatives, and nationalism as a way of structuring community was one. Literary renewal too was in a sense a search for alternative cultural expression. The literary and cultural revival began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of *al-Nahda* in the case of Arabs and *Zartonk* in the case of Armenians. As for the innovative literary efforts of both sides, Western influence was considerable, especially in terms of genre: the novel, short story and drama were introduced from European literary traditions.

Romanticism and Realism also made their way into both literatures, bringing individual and other social aspects of life into literature. Therefore, the classical phase of both literatures came to an end and the efforts of popularising literature gathered pace. Two factors played an important role: the introduction of the vernacular in the Armenian case and the expansion of education in both cases. Therefore, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century change (some would call it “modernity”) was knocking on the door.

This cultural revival came hand in hand with nationalism, which by the 1920s was in full swing. With nationalism came the puritan view of literature. It was the idea of having a literature that would reflect the values of the given “nation”. In this sense, authenticity was a buzzword in the criticism of both literary traditions.

### *The debate in Armenian literary criticism*

The debates on the future direction of Armenian literature in *Nor Sharzhoum* spread over all 52 issues of the periodical. Mkhitarian opens the debate with an article,<sup>468</sup> the first one of a long series, outlining the generally bleak picture of Armenian literature<sup>469</sup> and setting the objectives for finding a new direction for “the literature of tomorrow” (this resonated with similar effect back in 1900 in Constantinople, when Ardashes Haroutyunian and the newspaper *Masis* propounded the idea of “the literature of tomorrow”). After posing a

<sup>468</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit. pp. 6-8.

<sup>469</sup> Mkhitarian does not specify the kind of Armenian literature he is talking about, but from the context of the article it is clear that his immediate object of attention was diasporan Armenian literature.

rhetorical question as to the direction that literature should go, he gives an outright answer: literature as a mirror “of the milieu and time has no choice but to talk from the essence of the Race, from its eternal wishes and from its immortal uniqueness”<sup>470</sup> (for the term “race” see Introduction). Only this kind of literature, which draws a defensive line against the looming dangers of alien infiltration, can guarantee “preservation of the race”.<sup>471</sup> Therefore, in order to achieve this goal the surviving writers have a crucial role to play since they are the ones who have to identify the future direction of literature. The faster they identify that direction, the better it will be for both the writers and the refugees because it will dissipate the uncertainty, thus facilitating survival.

In that sense Armenian subject matter should be at the heart of any literary production. Literature which depicts “its milieu, the national values and racial characteristics”<sup>472</sup> will be unreservedly applauded by the wider readership because only these values can secure the longevity of a literary work. In other words the Armenianness of an Armenian literary work makes it “unique” and distinguishable from “Other” literary works. Mkhitarian states that there is a fallacy among Armenian writers that the “universal subject matters”<sup>473</sup> of literary works can bring immediate success. Mkhitarian did not spell out what “universal subject matters” stands for. A similar idea was articulated during the debate between Ardashes Haroutyunian and Reteos Berberian in 1900 in the framework of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné* (see Chapter Five). This is not the case for Armenian writers, continues Mkhitarian, who command very limited knowledge of international life, let alone the ability to depict it. He rejects the idea that cultivating a uniquely Armenian life as subject matter will “limit the inspiration of the writer”.<sup>474</sup> What Mkhitarian wanted to say was that Armenian writers were not intellectually equipped for broader social and cultural issues, and had no knowledge of, say, the French way of life, mentality and psychology and consequently they would not be able to depict the “foreign” milieu as authentically as French writers. Armenian writers should not think that fame will come from the depiction of the “foreign” milieu. In this sense the Armenian milieu was no less inspirational than the “foreign” one.

Mkhitarian raises the question of the artistic freedom of the writers. He emphatically states that “the artist must give whatever his talent dictates and make no concession for the

<sup>470</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit., p. 6.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

people”, going on to say “just depict its life, and depict it with the utmost degree of your talent”.<sup>475</sup> By which he meant that artists had a duty to portray the Armenian way of living in their characters and their aspirations, but were free to portray it in their own ways, according to their aesthetic views. He vehemently denied that this would in any way limit the creative freedom of the writers. No life can be more fascinating than the Armenian one, which was full of “tragedy”,<sup>476</sup> [*voghperkoutyun*] and “farce”,<sup>477</sup> [*zaveshd*], especially during the previous couple of decades. This rich Armenian life has scores of key players across the social divide and regardless of their social standing and gender they had to be brought to literature with their baggage of personal and collective “mourning [...] struggles [...] defeats [...] faith [and] disappointments”.<sup>478</sup> Most importantly, Mkhitarian evokes the image of the lost homeland with its stunning natural beauty; this should be an important component of the creative subject matter.

The nostalgia for the remote rural way of life and its nature was the echo of the Pastoral trend entrenched in the European literary traditions. In Western Armenian literature, especially in the post-Genocide diaspora, this trend gained currency with a change of objective. While Pastoral literature in general evoked the idyllic and unspoiled rural way of living, in the Armenian case it functioned according to the needs of the time in the diaspora situation. The idealisation of the rural way of life was designed to enhance its romantic appeal for the purposes of survival. For some critics the values that originated from that environment were worthy components in the construction of Armenian cultural identity in diaspora.

Mkhitarian asserts that Armenian writers are more knowledgeable of the Armenian life, and in the case of urgent close observation it was widely accessible. With the Armenian life they share more common values than with the one “with the abstract and misty life of the so-called international “wide horizon” (that is, the non-Armenian ways of life).<sup>479</sup> He states that the more writers get to know their milieu and expose its peculiarities by accentuating the physical features of the homeland and spiritual aspirations of the Armenian “nation”, the more art becomes “independent”.<sup>480</sup> In this sense Armenian writers should not imitate foreign literatures but must create their own. They should be satisfied with a modest role

<sup>475</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Bedk é Danił*, loc. cit. p. 528.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

within the “national” literary framework, because “it is in vain to suffer with the delirium of producing Hamlets and Fausts”.<sup>481</sup> In another article<sup>482</sup> in *Nor Sharzhoum* Mkhitarian exhorts new writers to view this enterprise as an “invitation”<sup>483</sup> to the writers, who are “wandering on the borders of foreign languages”.<sup>484</sup> This will help them to find their individuality instead of being a “pale echo”<sup>485</sup> of other writers. It is also an “invitation” to realise the source “of their physical and spiritual leaven [*khmor*]”,<sup>486</sup> which is Armenian “national society”.<sup>487</sup>

As a general comment it must be noted that by promoting the depiction of Armenian milieu Mkhitarian stresses the importance of the realist way of engaging in literature. He does not promote Realism as a literary school but as a mode that Armenian writers would employ to translate the impressions of life into words; Balzacian Realism was not necessarily on the agenda.

According to another prominent writer and critic, Hagop Oshagan, the Armenian village was a microcosm; it encompassed life’s three main elements, namely people, animals and nature. The relations between these were interconnected and intricate. He expressed his regret for the irretrievable loss of the village, the most important ground of Armenian “ethnicity”. For that reason the village would be absent in Western Armenian literature (by which he understood the literature of diaspora), thereby jeopardising its creative continuity. As far as Oshagan was concerned, the existence of Western Armenian literature was linked to the fate of the village, which was the source of its inspiration. Now that that was gone, the future of Western Armenian literature was in the balance. To depict the village and especially to give a voice to the villagers, whom Oshagan labels as the “authentic Armenians”,<sup>488</sup> was equivalent to discovering the “authentic inner world of our soul”.<sup>489</sup> He states that the village should be the centre ground of literature, and it was the space from where a “great work of art”<sup>490</sup> could take shape.

I have repeated numerous times that it was a generally held view among people of letters that the Armenian rural life was the breeding ground for “ethnic” values. It was the time

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian *Azkayin Kraganoutian Hartsé (Jshtoumner)* loc. cit., pp. 756-758.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., p. 756.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> See *Kyughé* [The Village], Hagop Oshagan, Part III, *Arev*, no. 1699, 27<sup>th</sup> September, Cairo, 1924.

<sup>489</sup> See Hagop Oshagan, *Kyughé*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>490</sup> See *Kyughé*, Hagop Oshagan, Part VI, *Arev*, no. 1712, 13<sup>th</sup> October, Cairo, 1924.

capsule of the mores, upon which the dust of centuries had accumulated layer upon layer, thus insulating the very essence of Armenianness from the decadence of the changing times. In this setting the villagers were the recipients and the preservationists of the “ethnic” merits, and the exposition of their life would mean peeling back the layers of history and bringing into the light the intact characteristics of the “race”.

*The example of Raffi*

H. Nalpantian<sup>491</sup> tackles the question of the interaction between writers and the people.<sup>492</sup> He states that literature is a potent tool of influence on all aspects of social life. He emphasises certain literary genres, such as poetry, the novel and especially drama, which cannot only exert great influence on society, but also bring about real social changes. Interestingly, he uses the example of a prolific writer, Raffi<sup>493</sup> (see Appendix), whose novels became a beacon of the bold messages of freedom, and shaped the ideological and moral content of the Armenian revolutionary movements from the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the period leading to Genocide. The choice of Raffi by Nalpantian as a reference point was not by chance. Most of his success was due to the fact that he was one of the few Armenian writers who travelled throughout the poorer parts of the Armenian provinces in 1857 in order to get to know the life of the ordinary people. During these trips he bore witness to the sufferings of the Armenian people at the hands of Turks and Kurds. He also witnessed the plight of the Armenian refugees in the Russian-Turkish war in 1877, which left an indelible mark on him. Later these impressions pervaded all his novels. Therefore, he was someone who empathised with the grief-stricken ordinary people, and most importantly he gave a vision of a free and prosperous Armenia through the dream of the protagonist of his most acclaimed work *Khenté* [The Fool] (1881). It was a vision that nurtured the imagination of generations.

Nalpantian does not furnish these details and does not draw any analogy between the experience of Raffi's exploration of Armenian life and similar efforts of the contemporary

<sup>491</sup> I could not specify the identity of this contributor.

<sup>492</sup> See H. Nalpantian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, loc. cit.

<sup>493</sup> For Raffi's works see *Raffi*, Arshag Chobanian, *Anahid*, no. 6, pp. 27-58, Paris, 1937; *Raffi, Gyanké Yev Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné* [Raffi, the Life and Works], E. Bedrosian, Yerevan, 1959; *Raffou Hay Azkayin-Azadakragan Sharzhman Kaghaparakhosoutyuné* [The Ideology of Raffi Concerning the Armenian National Liberation Movement], S. Sahagian, Yerevan, 1990; *Raffi: Kaghaparneri Yev Gerbarneri Hamagarké* [Raffi: The System of Ideas and Characters], S. Sarinian, Yerevan, 1985.

writers. However, in the continuation of his argument he urges the writers to come into close contact with the Armenian way of life and to take their subject matter from the life of the ordinary people. The production of a “living”<sup>494</sup> literary work which can endure the judgment of time is heavily contingent upon the scale of interaction between the writer and ordinary people. The writer “has to feel himself in his environment”,<sup>495</sup> be part of the communal life and embrace this unique opportunity; s/he has to exploit the repository of the spiritual and intellectual values – in other words “the Armenian writer has to make an effort in order to display [...] the feeling, instincts, faith, suffering and aspirations”<sup>496</sup> of the people. Nalpantian stresses that a literature which lacks this popular solid base has very feeble chances of development, because “a literature which does not absorb its energy from people, cannot mobilise it, cannot lead it”.<sup>497</sup>

In one of his articles<sup>498</sup> Mkhitarian complains about Armenian literature being very elitist, and concludes that if literature is a potent tool for survival then the enlargement of its zone of influence will mean the engagement of wide segments of society in efforts of survival. There are two solutions for the popularisation of literature: first, to bring people closer to literature, and second, to bring literature closer to the people. He asserts that these two sides, the people and literature, are “uncommunicative”,<sup>499</sup> because the culture of reading is not pervasive in Armenian society. The segment of society which has the habit of reading prefers not to read Armenian literature, but poor quality foreign literature. For this kind of readership “the *essential* in the literary work is not the artistic merit, but only the *suspense*”<sup>500</sup> [the author’s *italics*] (Mkhitarian uses the term *hedakrkraganoutyuné*, the approximate translation of which is “interest”, though a freer translation may be “interestingness”). And there is an army of foreign writers, who produce literature in the form of adventurous stories and romances, the two favourite genres of the readership. Mkhitarian as an example mentions names of the following books: “Wandering Jew” (Eugène Sue),<sup>501</sup> “The Count of Monte Cristo” (Alexander Dumas), and two anonymous books for teenagers “Nick Carter” and

<sup>494</sup> See H. Nalpantian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, loc. cit., p. 41.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Hay Kraganoutyuné Yev Hasaragoutyuné*, loc. cit.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Eugène Sue (1804-1857) was French writer, who wrote sensational novels.

“Nuck Pin Kerton”.<sup>502</sup> In order to prevent the impending spiritual and intellectual desertification it is crucial to take the people closer to the sources of Armenian literature.<sup>503</sup>

Sirouni also stresses the role of the people as a vital element for the production of “ethnic” literature. He says that because of the loose link between the Armenian writer and the people “our race does not have its authentic literature”.<sup>504</sup> He suggests bringing the Armenian writer close to the “soul of his race”,<sup>505</sup> a move which will make the literary works more authentic. Therefore, in Sirouni’s criticism (which was shared by other critics, too), people form the “soul of the race”, a reference point of inspiration and authenticity.

### *A different approach*

The depiction of Armenian life as subject matter for some critics was not vital for the exposition of Armenian characteristics in literature; instead these characteristics are expressed in the process of creative efforts. Unlike other critics, they stated that the quintessentially Armenian creative style of the writer was the trademark of Armenianness. In this sense, Oshagan and Sirouni were at variance with Mkhitarian and Nalpantian. Although Oshagan advocated cultivating the rural Armenian way of life as literary subject matter, ironically he stated that it is not the portrayed life itself that makes literature “national”, but the way we portray it. What Oshagan meant was that the authenticity of literature of any nation consists in the way the writers see, interpret and express the phenomena of life, and not the mere depiction of a given nation’s life. The social content of the literatures are more or less the same, but the mode of expression differs from one nation to the other, something which Oshagan refers to as “national soul”.<sup>506</sup> Oshagan does not articulate what constitutes a “national soul”, in other words the elements of the mode of expression. What are its manifestations? Are they linguistic, aesthetic or other quintessentially Armenian characteristics?

<sup>502</sup> I transliterated the title as it is cited.

<sup>503</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Zhoghovourté Tebi Kraganoutyun Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit.

<sup>504</sup> See *Hay Horizonen* [From the Armenian Horizon], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 6, March-April, p. 189, Bucharest, 1924.

<sup>505</sup> See *Odor Yerginknerou Dag* [Under Foreign Skies], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 9, August, p. 257, Bucharest, 1924.

<sup>506</sup> See Hagop Oshagan, *Kyughé*, Part III, loc. cit.

Sirouni does not subscribe to the idea that the portrayal of the Armenian milieu would secure the “ethnic” character of the literary work.<sup>507</sup> He differentiates between “racial line”<sup>508</sup> and “national subject matter”<sup>509</sup> in literature, and while he did not elucidate the significance of each of these phrases, his view in general terms was quite transparent. By the former he alluded to the stylistic specificities which were part of the literary identity of Armenian literary productions. The latter predictably referred to the portrayal of Armenian milieu. He emphasises that the cultivation of a literature for the sake of the subject matter is complete “artificiality”;<sup>510</sup> he cites the example of the didactic plays from the Armenian heroic past, which were created in Constantinople in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by scores of writers, such as Mgrdich Beshigtashlian, Srabion Hekimian, Srabion Tghlian, Bedros Tourian and others. Those plays were created in a specific socio-political condition of Armenian history in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century known as *Zartonk* [Revival] when there was an upsurge of “national” awareness of the issues of “national” significance. They were therefore designed to inflame the “national” consciousness of the Armenians and were consigned to oblivion in the 1920s because they lacked the most important element, the creation of “beauty”: the aesthetic side of the literary work was compromised for the sake of its political message.

Evidently as far as Sirouni was concerned, “beauty” was an important component of artistic production and should therefore have a dominant role in the construction of literary works. This would enhance the Armenian cultural identity by bringing it into the framework of aesthetics.

He even rejects the idea that the Armenian language is the principal marker of Armenianness in Armenian literature. He uses the example of three poets, Krikor Naregatsi, Sayat-Nova and Nahabed Kouchag, whose language of poetry is unintelligible to contemporary readers.<sup>511</sup> Having said that, beneath the different dialects their poetry shares one similarity: “they narrate the soul of our race”.<sup>512</sup> Sirouni’s point was clear: from Naregatsi (10<sup>th</sup> century) to Sayat-Nova (18<sup>th</sup> century) the continuity in the narration is the

<sup>507</sup> See *Houné Kdnelou Hamar*, loc. cit., p. 195, and *Inch Grna Dal Kaghouté* [What the Émigré Communities can Give], (Hagop) Sirouni, *Harach*, no. 741, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, Paris, 1928.

<sup>508</sup> See [Hagop] Sirouni, *Inch Grna Dal Kaghouté*, loc. cit.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> The language of Naregatsi was ornate classical Armenian. Sayat-Nova wrote in three different Caucasian languages, namely, Georgian, Azeri and Armenian. The language of his Armenian poems was the Armenian dialect of Tiflis. The poems attributed to Kouchag are in Middle Armenian.

<sup>512</sup> See *Houné Kdnelou Hamar*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 195.



guarantee of the sustainability of Armenianness, which is the nucleus of Armenian works of art.

What were the components of the “the soul of the race” and what were their characteristics? Sirouni does not spell this out. Time and again such notions are thrown up without an articulation of their conceptual framework. There are some questions to be asked: what was the difference between “Armenian soul” and the “soul of the race”? Were they different concepts with different functions? Did they complement each other? If that was the case, what were their relations? How did they interact?

Both Oshagan and Sirouni do not mention any genre as a vehicle of expression for the “soul” of “nation” or “race”. Which literary genre would provide the agility to express the depth and enormity of it? Poetry was the traditional Armenian genre, the other genres, such as the novel, drama and short story were derived from European literary traditions. In the early 1920s Western Armenian writers had already become familiar with these genres, for example Oshagan mastered the short story and the novel (especially the latter from the 1930s). In this discourse the discussions around the issue of genre were absent. Although Sirouni and Oshagan emphasised the importance of the way that writers express themselves, for some critics the stress was more on the message of literature, rather than the way it was expressed. The aesthetic side of literature was not at the top of the critical agenda. They also do not mention any preferable literary genre or literary school as a mode of expression, or moulds in which the writers should cast their creative productions.

As we see, there was a keen effort by both critics to stress the role of “racial uniqueness” in literature. Unlike Mkhitarian, they gave great importance to the aesthetic side of literary works. Mkhitarian adamantly advocated the depiction of Armenian life without giving much importance to the way writers express themselves. The vital thing was the exposition of “racial uniqueness”. This flirtation with aesthetics was well entrenched in the Western Armenian literary traditions. In the literary critical circles this was seen as the direct influence of French literary traditions. On the contrary, in Eastern Armenian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the content was more important than the expression: the exposition of existing evils in society and their criticism had a much higher priority than aesthetics. Literature was widely seen as a tool for spreading a social message in the form of Realism.

Nshan Desdegyul had a novel and more tolerant approach with regard to the depiction of the Armenian milieu. He advocated the depiction of the American-Armenian milieu as

subject matter, such as workers, family, social life and language. He stated that the existence of the Armenian community in the USA had a history of more than half a century, during which “certain and distinctive traits”<sup>513</sup> of American civilisation left its deep marks “on the soul of our [Armenian] community”.<sup>514</sup> More interestingly, he emphasised the need for observation of the results of the relations between the Armenian community and “diverse races”<sup>515</sup> (by which he meant ethnic groupings).

This aspect of Desdegyul’s view needs to be observed more closely. First of all, from the very beginning of the formation phase of diasporan literature he highlights the importance of the exposition of life in diasporan communities. The remarkable point is that we see a familiarisation with the idea of depicting common Armenian people in the communities – this was a shift from the idea of depicting only the life of homeland.

His advocacy of the depiction of Armenian life in America could be applicable to other communities where there was a concentration of Armenian people and writers. Moreover, the creative activity of Armenian writers should not be limited within the parameters of “ethnic” society; it should cross that line and reach to the experience of other “races”. But this was not a sufficient step, as it did not go far enough; for instance, he did not advocate the depiction of other immigrant workers in the USA. The interest towards other ethnicities was limited by the amount of their interaction with Armenians. Rather than embracing the multi-ethnic nature of the USA, Desdegyul advocated precautionous observation of the results of relations between Armenian and other immigrant communities. Interestingly, the very idea of the inclusion of the experience of other races itself, although limited, was a novel idea in diasporan literary criticism.

### *Lack of knowledge*

Peniamin Tashian was one of the young self-taught critics whose ideas were full of inconsistencies. His reaction to the imposition of the depiction of the Armenian milieu and especially of homeland was robust. He rightfully underlines the existing lack of knowledge among the new generation of writers of the homeland in topographical terms, of its mountains, rivers, and plains. They did not have the chance to experience the feel of being in the country. There was also a spiritual rupture between the new breed of writers and the

<sup>513</sup> See Nshan Desdegyul, *Mer Kraganoutyuné (Ourvakdzer)*, loc. cit., p. 253.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

people of the country or countryside and they were ignorant about the worldview and the psychology of the rural people.

Tashian's remark was to the point, since the new generation of writers did not have the chance to live in the homeland. Most of the writers were forced to leave the country early in their teens, and therefore the frame of their memory was not completely formed and some of them were not born in mainland Armenia.<sup>516</sup> These writers included the major representatives of the generation, such as Nigoghos Sarafian (b. 1902, Varna, Bulgaria), Vazken Shoushanian (b.1902, Rodosto, Turkey), Pyuzant Topalian (b. 1902, Ayntab, Cilicia), Shahan Shahnour (b. 1903, Constantinople), and Zareh Vorpouni (b. 1904, Ordou, Turkey). Some writers, such as Hamasdegh (b. 1895), Peniamin Nourigian (b.1897) and Vahé Hayg (b. 1896) were born in Kharpert in Armenia a little earlier than the others. They transformed their rural memories and impressions of childhood and teenage life into literary works.

Hrand Palouyian (see Appendix) also dwells upon this issue. It was important for him at what stage the writers left their natural habitat, namely the homeland. If they had left before the formation of their "character"<sup>517</sup> and "psychology",<sup>518</sup> then their literature would be "misty"<sup>519</sup> by which he meant that their literature would not distinctly delineate the feature of the environment in which they were born. If the writers left the homeland after the mentioned phase then they could produce characteristically "national" literature, but it would be limited, because in the absence of the homeland the source of inspiration will dry up. Palouyian underscores two important points. Firstly, the Armenian writers in dispersion were "transplanted"<sup>520</sup> into different cultural climates, and the interaction with local cultures was inevitable. And secondly, the more time passes the less palpable become the impressions of homeland. A literature which feeds on this kind of vague impressions could lose its vitality, which, as Palouyian puts it, would give Armenian literature a "pale"<sup>521</sup> existence.

Tashian justifiably argues that the new writers were asked to produce "ethnic" literature, but they did not possess the basic knowledge of its two main components, namely the country and her people. The advocates of the creation of "ethnic" literature, as Tashian

<sup>516</sup> Mainland Armenia comprised the six Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, namely, Van, Garin (Erzroum), Paghesh (Bitlis), Dikranagerd (Diyarbakir), Kharpert (Mamouret el Aziz) and Sepasdia (Sivas).

<sup>517</sup> See "Hayrenik" *Amsakrin Hnkamiagé* [The Fifth Anniversary of Hayrenik Monthly], Hrand Palouyian, Part I, *Harach*, no. 551, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, Paris, 1928.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> I borrow the term from Hagop Oshagan, who used the French word "transplantation" in the same context. See Hagop Oshagan, *Kyughé*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>521</sup> See Hrand Palouyian, "Hayrenik" *Amsakrin Hnkamiagé*, Part I, loc. cit.

surmises, might argue that even if the new writers do not have the knowledge of provincial life, beneath every individual identity of Armenians “the soul is the same”,<sup>522</sup> which unifies them around certain “ethnic” values and shared experience. The exploration and exploitation of this soul would create “ethnic” literature. Although the Armenian writers were in different parts of the world geographically, as far as the “ethnic” features of Armenian literature was concerned this would not have any effect on the Armenianness of their literary works; the result of their endeavours would be the same because they shared the same “ethnic” values.

Tashian does not subscribe to this view, stating that the political upheavals had scattered Armenians across the four corners of the world, a fact which would diminish “ethnic” consciousness, efface the “inner physiognomy”,<sup>523</sup> and dismantle “the whole orderly system”,<sup>524</sup> of Armenian literature. The local cultural influences on Armenian literature will be very strong, and it is an inevitable fact that Armenian literature will be “American in America [...] Russian in Russia [and] French in France”.<sup>525</sup> Therefore, he has well-founded concerns that literature of the Armenian diaspora written in the Armenian language will be in constant retreat in terms of maintaining its “ethnic” features. This is due to inevitable interaction with “Other” local cultures, which in the coming decades will become a trend.

There is another aspect to Tashian’s refusal to depict the Armenian milieu. In the continuation of his argument, Tashian warns the new generation away from repeating “the sin”,<sup>526</sup> of Movses Khorenatsi, “who did not give us whatever his age possessed”,<sup>527</sup> namely the pagan cultural heritage which had survived until his age between the 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>528</sup> After the conversion Christianity in 301 there was a strenuous effort to obliterate the pagan culture from Armenian life and Khorenatsi had his role in that struggle. He was the founding father of Armenian historiography, who in his work of *Badmoutyun Hayots* [History of the Armenians] decried the pagan cultural heritage and expunged it from his work as unworthy. In order to corroborate his argument, he cited from pagan poetic oral tradition to show the defects of that culture. And these fragments of pre-Christian oral poetry were the only cultural heritage that survived from that age.

<sup>522</sup> See P. Tashian, *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Hed*, loc. cit., p. 542.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., p. 543.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> See *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, P. Tashian Part II, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 50-52, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, p. 748, Cairo, 1924.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> There is great confusion and controversy surrounding the dating of Movses Khorenatsi.

Tashian artfully employed the example of Movses Khorenatsi for the purposes of his own argument. He criticises the most revered figure of Armenian literature for not being the “mirror” of his era, which would have saved the priceless pagan cultural heritage, such as the songs, beliefs and way of life of pre-Christian Armenia; in short, Khorenatsi did not express the head and the heart of the pagan cultural heritage, or as it is in Armenian “the thought [...] with heart”.<sup>529</sup>

The message of Tashian was unambiguous as far as literature was concerned; the mistake of Khorenatsi should not be repeated. The writers had to realise that their literary production should be the testimony of their era. The best way of saving the experience of the Armenians in exile was to put it in aesthetic form, as by doing that they would save a period of history, which would be part of the “national” collective memory. The lapses of memory caused by any form of bias by the writers (as Khorenatsi had against pagan culture) would impoverish Armenian culture. Therefore, the cultivation of “ethnic” literature based on the past experience of provincial life would diminish the significance of the present experience; the continuity of the memory had to be preserved for posterity.

According to him the only thing which will avert the complete “fall”,<sup>530</sup> of Armenians in diaspora for the time being is “to deepen our nationalism”<sup>531</sup> in every domain, especially in literature”,<sup>532</sup> until the time comes when Armenians will have the chance to celebrate their culture and the way of living in their homeland.

Some aspects of this argument attract our attention. For a “nation” which survived the Genocide, lost its homeland and was facing an unknown future, embracing nationalism was an instinctive reaction of “ethnic” survival, a vital act demarcating “ethnic” boundaries. This was viewed as a provisional arrangement; there was always the glimmer of the hope of return, which was another factor of survival itself. By contradicting himself Tashian promotes nationalism in literature, neither spelling out nor fleshing out its nature and function. One might ask how someone promoted nationalism when he acknowledged that the new generation of writers (including himself) was unfamiliar with its main tenets, namely in-depth knowledge of the homeland and her people. Was there any other source of inspiration for nationalism in Tashian’s mind? What were the ingredients of his nationalism? We cannot know the answer.

<sup>529</sup> See P. Tashian, *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, Part II, loc. cit., p. 748.

<sup>530</sup> See P. Tashian, *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Hed*, loc. cit., p. 543.

<sup>531</sup> Tashian uses the term *azkaynoutyun*.

<sup>532</sup> See P. Tashian, *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Hed*, loc. cit., p. 543.

Mkhitarian responded to Tashian's negative stance with regard to the issue of the creation of "ethnic" literature in an article.<sup>533</sup> He recounts the previous efforts towards the creation of "ethnic" literature by some dedicated writers, namely Bishop Karekin Srvantsdians, Mgrdich Khrimian, Father Ghevont Alishan, Tlgadintsi, Roupen Zartarian (about these writers see Appendix) and the debates surrounding this issue back in Constantinople (see Chapter Five). Mkhitarian melancholically recalls that during these literary activities the Armenian people were in their homeland, and the provinces were a living reality. Now the homeland is lost and subsequently the whole culture which was the source of intellectual and spiritual inspiration has vanished. He accepts that this fact gives ammunition to Tashian and people like him, who think that the new generation of writers have insufficient knowledge of their homeland. It is also true that Armenians could not bring about "characteristically Armenian"<sup>534</sup> or "national"<sup>535</sup> literature as a general trend, but there were a few writers whose literary production bore all the characteristics of "ethnic" values, and this was enough to maintain the Armenianness of literature. On this basis Mkhitarian draws the first conclusion that the endeavours of even a few writers will not only make the creation of "ethnic" literature possible, but also save a whole generation from the blame of not doing so. Having this prospect in mind, he maintains his previously expressed views on getting rid of the "foreign enervating influence"<sup>536</sup> and bringing into the literary framework "the Armenian homeland, the Armenian people, and individual and collective Armenian psychology".<sup>537</sup> Only this kind of approach, first, can bring common people to literature. It will also have a therapeutic effect: it will "revive the Armenian soul",<sup>538</sup> thus invigorating the Armenian literature.

He asserts in the second conclusion he draws in this debate that literature can be inspired by Armenian homeland, people and milieu. This would be more "natural"<sup>539</sup> for the writers than depicting their local French, English, Italian and Greek people, their country and life, because the writers are more familiar with Armenian life. Mkhitarian warns that because of the traumatic experience and despondent existence of the new writers their literary achievements will be modest, therefore expectations should be curtailed. But having said

<sup>533</sup> See *Dohmig Kraganoutyun Mé Gareli é* [Is an Ethnic Literature Possible?], Kourken Mkhitarian, *Nor Sharzhoun*, no. 38-39, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, pp. 597-600, Cairo, 1923.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 598.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 599.

that, the new generation can partly prevent the impending decline if they stop “flying”<sup>540</sup> in the unfamiliar skies of foreign thought and “limit their illusory visions”.<sup>541</sup> Mkhitarian reminds new writers of their responsibility, which is to celebrate the creativity of their “race”, delving into its history, cultivating the tales, depicting its life of the past and taking “a look into the Armenian huts”.<sup>542</sup> It was important to submerge into the soul of the “race”, in order to bring into the light the authentic Armenian characters, and “instead of Edward or Albert, to use Yervant or Krikor, Garbis or Mgo, of course, and undoubtedly, with their corresponding life and psychology”.<sup>543</sup>

At this juncture Mkhitarian brings up Tashian’s argument of the pervasive ignorance among new writers about the homeland. He agrees with Tashian that the majority of the young writers have not had enough experience of living in the homeland and with her people. But, he continues, it was also true that there was a considerable number of writers who had the experience of living in the provinces such as Kharpert, Van, Erzroum, Sepasdia and other settlements.<sup>544</sup> No matter how short the duration of their experience or how vague their memory was, the fact remained that they had some degree of interaction and now out of the homeland they are interacting on a daily basis with common people and their culture. At this point Mkhitarian justifiably poses the question, “is it this people that we do not recognise?”<sup>545</sup> Therefore he finds the excuses of Tashian groundless and criticises his literary generation of abandoning their duty of depicting Armenian life. He states that “it is inconceivable how Mr Tashian, like others, does not recognise the Zabel of his village, but he recognises the Italian Isabella”.<sup>546</sup>

I would like to comment on some of the aspects of Mkhitarian’s arguments. First of all, Mkhitarian time and again insists on the idea that the Armenianness of diasporan literature is dependent on the depiction of the Armenian milieu, which will give a distinct identity to literary texts. The depiction of the life of ordinary people was a key element in this discourse. The widening of the literary perspective would distract the attention of Armenian writers from the “national” agenda of survival. They would waste creative energy and time on literary experiments, with the usefulness of their results not guaranteed. This aesthetic

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., p. 600.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid. The last four are Armenian male names.

<sup>544</sup> All mentioned places were in Armenia.

<sup>545</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Dohmig Kraganoutyun Mé Gareli é*, loc. cit., p. 599.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid. Zabel is an Armenian female name.

indulgence of the writers would be an irresponsible stance on behalf of thousands of grief-stricken Armenians, who needed immediate moral and emotional support, something which would only be provided by the writers in the form of literature, which would bring to the fore the important issues of the time.

Another aspect of this debate is that Mkhitarian has a very short-term strategy for the future of Armenian “ethnic” literature in the diaspora. He links its fate to the few in a generation which barely remembers the homeland. Where would Armenian literature go after that? What would be the nature of it? He has no answers.

Ethnocentricity is the kernel of his critical thought. This inward gaze was an essential task in order to shed light on the distinct “ethnic” traits, and to bring those values into literature as vital components. This stance had its reasons and consequences: literature was perceived as a very potent tool for the salvation of the “nation” in this critical period of time. It accomplishes this role only if it becomes the vehicle for the exposition of “ethnic” features. In exile the “ethnic” features need to be insulated from detrimental foreign influences, therefore the best way of doing so is to depict it through literature. Generally, the discourse concerning the preservation of “ethnic” values in the 1920s was a re-articulation of similar ideas of the previous generation (see Chapter Five). Here, for further corroboration of the pervasiveness of this kind of thinking it is worth introducing to the argument an article written by Shavarsh Misakian in 1911. In it he recounts his journey through Armenia as part of a caravan composed of Armenians and Turks. The Turks are unable to keep pace with the *natural rapid advancement of Armenians* [my emphasis]. He passes through many villages and towns that “smell East”<sup>547</sup> with their static life and laziness. He comes across many people, and although he does not specify their ethnicity, it is clear from the context of the narrative that he refers to both Armenians and Turks, who share the same cultural markers of backwardness. Facing this undesirable prospect of losing cultural uniqueness he rings the alarm bells of the assimilation of Armenian “ethnic” values into Turkish culture. He sadly asserts that “Armenians and Turks differ more from each other by their names”.<sup>548</sup> The metaphorically expressed fast pace of the Armenians towards development will not be a characteristically “ethnic” trait anymore, because “the Turks will assimilate us, they will

<sup>547</sup> See *Vayrgianer* [Moments], Shavarsh Misakian, *Harach*, no. 21. 628, 26<sup>th</sup> January, Paris, 2007. The original article was published in the almanac of Teotig called *Amenoun Daretsouytsé* [Everyone’s Almanac] in 1911. The citations will refer to the first source.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.



distort our identity”.<sup>549</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to return to the source of “ethnic” values, whatever they may be, and the efforts should be concentrated “on dismantling that unrecognisable grey mass, to purify and to form the new Armenian people”.<sup>550</sup> The emphasised uniqueness of Armenian identity was the key element in the discourse of forming the “national” identity. This kind of approach was adopted by many intellectuals and writers in the post-Genocide diaspora, and was designed to construct a literary identity which would be compatible with the “ethnic” criteria. Evidently, this was ideological absolutism imposed on literature, the writers being coerced to follow certain regulations: they had to create in an environment almost like literary totalitarianism. Mkhitarian was not directly advocating isolationism, but the type of literature he was promoting would indirectly lead to cultural isolation. Aesthetics in this case were incompatible with the nationalist agenda of Mkhitarian and therefore, it was completely left out of his policy on literature. That is why he asserted that the writers have the freedom to employ any literary form, according to their aesthetic taste, provided they depict the Armenian life.

There was some truth in the arguments of both Mkhitarian and Tashian with regards to the new writers’ level of knowledge of provincial life and people. But the interesting aspect of Mkhitarian’s approach was the unintentional ambivalence in his stance on the choice of period and geography, which would be the basis for the depiction of Armenian life in literature. On the one hand he was arguing with Tashian that the life of the ordinary people consists of the past and the present, thus leaving a window of opportunity open to the new writers to engage in the efforts of depicting the present state of Armenian life, something which was within the scope of their knowledge. On the other hand he stressed the need for depicting the near past of Armenian life,<sup>551</sup> namely pre-Genocide provincial life and the homeland with her infinite beauty. There was a constant temporal and spatial shift in the arguments of Mkhitarian; the geographical space and the timeframe were not clearly articulated.

### *Formulation of literary principles*

Bringing together all intellectuals for the bigger collaborative project of reconstructing Armenian cultural life was for some critics one of the priorities of the time (see Chapter

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Dohmig Kraganoutyun Mé Gareli é*, loc. cit., p. 600.

Three). In the framework of the formation of the future literature the importance of the gathering of writers around certain literary principles was put forward by H. Nalpantian, who advocated the idea of the formulation of a “literary principle” [*kragan desaged*],<sup>552</sup> (*desaged* literally means “view” and “viewpoint”, but in the context of the article it means “principle”) without spelling out the nature of the “principle” that would be the credo of the writers. He argues that the commitment to a “literary principle” will not infringe on the artistic rights of the writers as some might regard it. He decries this kind of attitude and affirms that “all literatures are based on principles”,<sup>553</sup> such as literary schools, and many talented writers follow them. Nalpantian tries to create a positive attitude among the Armenian writers in diaspora towards any probable future gathering under a certain literary banner, because any such enterprise “will need strong discipline”,<sup>554</sup> and therefore “inevitably should have its distinct principle”.<sup>555</sup>

Certain aspects of this argument require closer analysis. In the domain of art, any form of conditions imposed on creativity would undermine the integrity of the artist. Mkhitarian and Nalpantian denied the fact that the freedom of Armenian writers was under threat. Their call for exploration of “racial essence” and exposure of “racial values” was nothing less than tailoring literature for certain ends. If this was the case then the role of the writer could diminish from being a creator of beauty to the more modest role of missionary, because s/he would be a vehicle for the dissemination of a literature, which pursued certain predetermined objectives.

Moreover, the core of the argument either for Mkhitarian or Nalpantian is the production of a literature which would expose the “racial essence”. This kind of rhetoric today would raise some eyebrows, but given the historical situation of Armenians at the time in diaspora, the emergence of such an approach under the camouflage of “literary principle” was the natural reaction to the catastrophe. Values that originated from the “racial essence” were the only trustworthy ones, where Armenian writers could anchor their “literary principles”. However, it needs to be emphasised that these two ideas were neither linked nor articulated as such. It must also be noted that there was a commanding tone in the rhetoric of both critics. In their articles addressed to the writers, both critics used the expressions “he has to” and “it needs to” numerous times. Nalpantian in one page (out of three) uses these around

<sup>552</sup> See H. Nalpantian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, loc. cit., p. 41.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

four times,<sup>556</sup> while Mkhitarian in one page (out of three) uses them around six times.<sup>557</sup> The tone of the rhetoric of both critics reflected the sense of urgency of the time.

### *Rejection of patronage*

Peniamin Tashian was the only participant from the new generation in this debate. In a series of articles in *Nor Sharzhoum*,<sup>558</sup> he dwells, alongside other issues, upon the formulation of literary principles. He tackles the subject of the future direction of Armenian literature. He shares Mkhitarian's view that Armenian literature was in steep decline and that it is imperative to change this course "for the sake of the spirit that gave to this people a magnificent literary generation and literary schools".<sup>559</sup> But, he insists, this generation (Constantinople generation) and their achievements are consigned to history, and their role is very limited: "they can illuminate, but they do not draw the direction that the future literature will follow".<sup>560</sup> Tashian refuses any kind of literary patronage from all living older writers or the emulation of the literary productions of the dead writers who were victims of the Genocide. He continues the line of argument by saying that any literary school or artistic direction "cannot be coerced",<sup>561</sup> – they "can be created".<sup>562</sup> It is "absurd"<sup>563</sup> to enjoin the young writers to follow a certain creative direction, because it "would mean infringing on freedom of thought".<sup>564</sup> On the contrary, the new generation of writers should explore new, undiscovered areas of the human intellectual and spiritual world.

At this stage, after a robust defensive in favour of the important role of individuality in literature, Tashian by contradicting himself poses the question "Who will specify<sup>565</sup> [*jshtel*] the tendency of that new literature?"<sup>566</sup> This begs the question what, in terms of artistic freedom, the difference was between "specifying the tendency" and "drawing the direction" of literature, something which Tashian did not elaborate. He continues to contradict himself by emphatically reaffirming the legitimacy of the literary formula devised

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>557</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Mer Nor Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit., p. 7.

<sup>558</sup> *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin* [The Direction of Armenian Literature], P. Tashian, *Nor Sharzhoum*, Part I, no. 9, 5<sup>th</sup> May, Cairo, 1923; Part II, no. 11, 19<sup>th</sup> May; Part III, no. 12, 26<sup>th</sup> May.

<sup>559</sup> P. Tashian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, Part I, loc. cit., p. 124.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> In this context the word "to specify" has the nuance of "to decide" or "to define".

<sup>566</sup> See P. Tashian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, Part I, loc. cit., p. 125.

by the previous generation, who advocated the idea of bringing the *pnashkharh* [provinces or homeland] into the centre ground of literature.

It seems that the role of the older generation was more than to illuminate the creative path of the new writers, as Tashian was claiming. To embark on a literary enterprise which was devised in certain socio-political circumstances in Constantinople was nothing but a self-imposed commitment. It showed not only the post-Genocide aesthetic vacuum of literature in diaspora, but also the absence of a sophisticated generation, who would originate the literary principles according to the spirit of the time. Advocating the depiction of rural life of the homeland (*pnashkharh*) was a repetition of the similar discourses of *vaghvan kraganoutyuné* [literature of tomorrow] (1900) and *hayasdaniayts kraganoutyun* [literature of all Armenians] (1914) (see Chapter Five). Here the important point is that advocating the lost homeland as a source of inspiration for literature was a limitation itself; it would narrow the creative space of the writers. Another point is, as I have mentioned earlier, that Tashian acknowledged the new generation's insufficient knowledge of the homeland and its way of living, yet he promotes a literary framework centred on homeland. He even argues that the emergence of literary leadership and subsequent formation of literary principles could diminish the basic right of creative freedom; however, they would also help to create "real bases [...] of the tendencies and directions"<sup>567</sup> of literary endeavours and they would provide the necessary support "in order to neutralise the hesitancy of the new paces"<sup>568</sup> of the new writers. Therefore, the "leaders"<sup>569</sup> of the new literature would assume the role of "guardians"<sup>570</sup> and prepare the ground for the "literature of tomorrow".<sup>571</sup>

The inconsistency in Tashian's argument with regard to the issue of patronage can be interpreted as a commonplace trait in his discourses. It can even be speculated on political grounds that he yielded to some kind of political pressure from the ARF party, with which he had a close affiliation. It is a generally held view that the ARF party in the post-Genocide diaspora made a concerted effort to exert its influence on every domain of Armenian life, political, social, educational, religious, and most probably artistic as well. The issue of literary patronage would be in accordance with the ARF's policy of controlling intellectual activities by setting the literary agenda.

<sup>567</sup> See P. Tashian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, Part III, loc. cit., p. 178.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

Zabel Yesayian was one of the older generation who opposed the formulation of literary principles. She presented widely held concerns on the inertial state of the new generation, something which gave a springboard to the older people of letters to take the initiative in devising a literary formula. According to some intellectuals this was designed to reduce confusion in the ranks of new writers and to reinvigorate the creative efforts in order to harness their youthful energy for “useful”<sup>572</sup> purposes. She observes that this sort of literary endeavour originates during a “period of weakness”<sup>573</sup> of Armenian history. She uses the example of the efforts of Ardashes Haroutyunian in 1900 in the wake of the Hamidian massacres (see Chapter Five). The quest for literary direction was tantamount to the spiritual and intellectual disorientation of the new generation of writers.

According to Yesayian the quest for the new direction was a “sterile activity”,<sup>574</sup> because individuals and the societies choose the direction of their activities according to their “inner impulsion”.<sup>575</sup> The writers who have a strong urge of creativity and are aware of their mission never engage in a “predetermined programme”.<sup>576</sup> Yesayian stresses the importance of the writers’ use of initiative to find an outlet for their intellectual and emotional satisfaction. Armenian literature was in a transitional period between generations; in that sense all the hesitancy of the writers at the start of their literary careers was commonplace. According to her, only mediocre writers can be committed to a literary enterprise, since they have no agenda based on their own individual experience.

Yesayian’s observation was to the point; this period of the quest for new avenues in literature was temporary, therefore the imposition of a literary programme in any form would hinder the efforts of the writers to establish their individuality. One can conclude that the lack of individual initiative and the attachment to ready-made projects would decrease the assertiveness of the writers, which in turn would prolong the state of uncertainty on the literary scene.

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<sup>572</sup> See *Kragan Oughin* [The Literary Direction], Zabel Yesayian, Part I, *Hayasdani Gochmag*, no. 6, 9<sup>th</sup> February, p. 168, Boston, 1924.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

*Exposition of ethnic values**Lack of ethnic characteristics*

At the risk of repeating myself I have to reiterate the view of a school of thought according to which if literature is the solid ground for the survival of Armenians in diaspora, then the exposition of “ethnic” values in literary texts would facilitate it. The main proponent of this idea is Kourken Mkhitarian, who asserts that “we do not have a literature which will characterise our “nationality”<sup>577</sup> [*azkaynoutyun*], by which he meant national characteristics. He cited two reasons that hindered the cultivation of “national” literature; first, the geographical factor, the remoteness of the urban centres from mainland Armenia, where the intellectual activities were concentrated; and second, the unfavourable political situation in Ottoman Turkey. In such conditions it was impossible to create characteristically Armenian literature; therefore, the promotion of the Armenian identity was excluded from the framework of Armenian literature. This was a mantra recited by at least two literary generations from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On this basis this view became the main component of a body of arguments put forward with the intention to justify the enhancement of the “national” character of literature. Mkhitarian continues this line of argument by saying that the reduced exposure of the Armenian identity in Constantinople literature resulted in the alienation of Western Armenian literature to the point that “the Armenian writer wrote in Armenian, but repeated, copied the texts of the foreign writer; he followed him, like a shadow, deprived of individual life”<sup>578</sup>. He asserts that the characters of the novels and the short stories in Armenian literature (his allusion was to Western Armenian literature) were not the epitome of Armenian individuality, but “with their word, manners, behaviour and psychology, they had nothing characteristically Armenian”<sup>579</sup>. For instance, the female characters of the literary texts in question were French by their “emotional and spiritual”<sup>580</sup> making, and during the transference of these characters from the French literary works of Dumas, Zola and Maupassant to the Armenian literary texts, “they have only

<sup>577</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Kraganoutyuné Zhoghovourtin Bedk é Danil*, loc. cit., p. 527.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

changed their names”.<sup>581</sup> In this context once again Krikor Zohrab was in the firing line for the non-Armenian characters in his works, especially the women, and “only his talent has saved him from being the foot soldier of Maupassant”.<sup>582</sup> For that reason there was confusion in locating such works in any literary tradition. They could neither fit in Armenian literature, since the characters did not display the appropriate “racial” traits, nor function in an international literary framework, because they fell short in artistry. Neither an Armenian nor non-Armenian readership would be satisfied with the existence of literary works with which they could not identify. As far as Mkhitarian was concerned those literary works were doomed; they were disowned by the very people whose cultural values they were supposed to represent and therefore consigned to oblivion. The picture in Eastern Armenian literature was different by virtue of some writers, such as Raffi, Hovhanes Toumanian (see Appendix) and Avedis Aharonian, whose literary production was closely linked to the life of rural people. The popular nature of Eastern Armenian literature was a well-documented fact in Armenian literary criticism.

In Western Armenian literature the popular support accorded to a few writers, Roupen Zartarian, Siamanto (see Appendix) and others like them, according to Mkhitarian, was largely due to the fact that they produced “a vibrant literature, invigorated by the blood of the Armenian race and by the sun of the Armenian fatherland”.<sup>583</sup> That is to say that they gave voice to the pains, sufferings and happiness of the common people; they depicted their way of living, traditions, customs, history and the country itself. Mkhitarian reaffirms his conviction that only this kind of literature will be appreciated not only by Armenians but also by the literati beyond the borders of Armenian literature, maybe not for its “artistic merits”<sup>584</sup> but as an “epitome of national uniqueness”.<sup>585</sup> Once again he emphasises the fact that the important merit of literary production was in the authentic depiction of popular life with certain “ethnic” markers rather than the artistic achievement. As an example, he

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

compares the poetry of Siamanto<sup>586</sup> with the poetry of Taniel Varouzhan and Misak Medzarents<sup>587</sup> (see Appendix).

Mkhitarian's choice of poets was not random: they were the three highest peaks of Armenian poetry. Siamanto's poetry was completely dedicated to the suffering and the struggle of the Armenian people in Hamidian and post-Hamidian era. Taniel Varouzhan's poetry was also dedicated to the glorification of the struggle for freedom of the Armenian people. Unlike Siamanto he also passionately wrote poems dedicated to love and women. During his educational years, first in Venice and then in Ghent, Varouzhan was influenced by European culture and art, which was traceable in his works. In the case of Misak Medzarents, lyricism was the character of his poetry; nature was one of the sources of inspiration, punctuated by deep humanitarianism. He was influenced by French Symbolism, for which he was severely criticised by some critics in Constantinople. Mkhitarian claims that Taniel Varouzhan's poetry was more aesthetically refined and that he was more talented than Siamanto, but people would prefer to read Siamanto over Varouzhan. Mkhitarian did not elaborate, but the point that he was trying to make was clear: although Varouzhan gave voice to the sufferings of the people and glorified the struggle, his poetry was refined and therefore inevitably bore the influence of European literary traditions; this was viewed as a kind of distortion of the original voice of the people. On the contrary, the poetry of Siamanto was not refined, it was more authentic to its sources of origin; therefore firstly it was more accessible, and secondly, it was the exact "mirror" of popular yearning. As for Misak Medzarents, Mkhitarian states very briefly that as a poet he was known only to literary circles, leaving us to extrapolate from his conclusion that the people at large had nothing to identify themselves with Medzarents' individualistic poetry – it was beyond the scope of popular concerns and aspirations. In this sense the new writers had to follow Siamanto's example by being the agent of expression for popular life and aspirations.

These three poets were born and bred in mainland Armenia. Siamanto and Medzarents were from Agn, and Varouzhan was from the village of Prknig in the province of Sepasdia. Both Varouzhan and Siamanto lived in Europe. Ironically, Medzarents was the only one who

<sup>586</sup> On Siamanto see *Hamabadger Arevndahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. VIII, Antelias, 1980; *Siamanto*, H. Rshdouni, Yerevan, 1970; *Siamantoyi Arvesdi Ourvakdzer* [Outlines of Siamanto's Art], Vladimir Giragosian, in *Kraganakidagan Yev Panasiragan Ousoumnasiroutyunner*, Vladimir Giragosian (edit.) pp. 114-133, Yerevan: Publication of Moughni, 2004.

<sup>587</sup> On Misak Medzarents see *Misak Medzarents*, Hrand Palouyian, *Vem*, [Cornerstone], no. 2, March-April, pp. 21-40, Paris, 1934; *Misak Medzarents*, Et. Chrpashian, Yerevan, 1958, 1977 (expanded edition); *Misak Medzarents*, H. Rshdouni, Yerevan, 1986; *Hamabadger Arevndahay Kraganoutian*, H. Oshagan, vol. IX, Antelias, 1980.



had never been to Europe, and yet his poetry bore the hallmarks of European influence more than the others, of which he was accused. Mkhitarian judges these poets not according to their artistic merits, but for the subject matter of their poetry.

Tashian agrees with Mkhitarian that the Armenians have not had a characteristically Armenian literature. In this sense he confirms that the few achievements in this domain were the result of individual efforts rather than a collective one. Roupen Zartarian, Hovhanes Toumanian, Tlgadintsi and Srvantsdiant (all were born and bred in rural Armenia, but they lived in cosmopolitan centres, except Srvantsdiant) were exceptions, as the majority of writers squandered their creative energy in “anational wandering” [*abazkayin tartapoum*].<sup>588</sup>

There was a lack of desire for the creation of “national literature”. According to him, Armenian writers have to submerge into their inner world, which is characteristically Armenian, and this will pave the way towards the “national literature”.<sup>589</sup>

Here one may be tempted to ask, how the “national literature” would be created. An enterprise of such scale needed coordinated collective efforts, which could only be realised by the formulation of certain literary principles, something that Tashian was opposed to. Therefore, he was indirectly contradicting himself, because the formulation of literary principles was none other than imposing certain commitments. The example of this kind of literature was evident in the form of the spiritless Proletariat literature of Soviet Armenia.

The explanation for promoting quintessentially Armenian literature was in Tashian’s belief that “literature of a small nation like us must mainly incline towards the creation, which bears its particular and national colour”,<sup>590</sup> because “the luminous horizon of Thought and Art, from where the great nations and people take their inspirations”,<sup>591</sup> was far from being in the grasp of the Armenian intellectual capacity. This unflattering intellectual image of Armenian writers was a sad reality in the early 1920s, when the new breed of writers was taking their first creative steps. Except for a few erudite and accomplished critics and writers from the older generation such as Hagop Oshagan and Gosdan Zarian, the majority of Armenian writers and intellectuals did not have enough education and background for a deep intellectual plunge. Therefore, the writers’ lack of sophistication (Tashian was one of them) made it difficult for them to grapple with intricate intellectual

<sup>588</sup> See P. Tashian, *Kraganoutyune Zhoghovourtin Hed*, loc. cit., p. 541. The word *anational* is the translation of the Armenian adjective of *abazkayin*, which means ‘alienated from national values’.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., p. 542.

<sup>590</sup> See P. Tashian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, Part III, loc. cit., p. 178

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

issues. But Tashian's real concern lay in another aspect of the argument: flirting with complex aesthetic and philosophical issues could have perilous consequences because it could lead Armenian writers into dangerous uncharted territories, where they would be enchanted by "foreign thought, foreign art, foreign notions, the foreign way of life",<sup>592</sup> and they would ignore the "unique"<sup>593</sup> traits of the Armenian life. According to Tashian the abandonment of this perspective could pose a much bigger danger by entangling the coming generations "in the abstraction of dreams, lusts and dreamy visions".<sup>594</sup>

Two points attract one's attention. First of all the protectionist attitude of both critics is worth considering, for as far as they were concerned the purification of Armenian literature was the most crucial defensive line for the preservation of the Armenian identity. The interaction of diasporan literature with alien elements of thought would dilute the very essence of the Armenian characteristics of literary texts. Therefore, there was no place for foreign artistic enterprises in Armenian literature, which would be solely dedicated to the preservation of Armenianness. "Ethnicity" was the last defensive line of literature. Another important point is that this insular attitude shown by Mkhitarian and Tashian stemmed from their cultural xenophobia: both were not exposed to European ideas and had no interaction to diverse cultures either in Constantinople or in Cairo.

### ***Homeland-bound literature***

#### *The absence of the homeland*

The importance of the existence of a geographical space as a cultural habitat for the creation of characteristically Armenian literature was another issue treated in this discourse. Some critics initiated the idea that without a homeland a literature of a "nation" cannot flourish. It is worth remembering that Armenians have always perceived themselves as a "nation" [*azk*], even in the absence of the geographical space which other nations would call homeland and where nation states would develop. Although the tiny fracture of so-called historical Armenia survived under Soviet rule, due to political reasons she was, at this stage, unreachable. Moreover, it was also not representative of all Armenians in political and geographical terms. Therefore, the dispersion was not a serious reason for them not to

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

perceive themselves as a "nation", especially since the hope of return to homeland was alive.

Sirouni was the main proponent of the idea that homeland was vital for the development of Armenian literature. He on numerous occasions<sup>595</sup> from 1924 to 1926 expresses his firm belief that the hub of Armenian cultural activities must be the homeland, by which he meant Soviet Armenia. According to him the idea of cultivating "ethnic" literature outside homeland is "delusional".<sup>596</sup> No matter how much Armenians are closely engaged in the literary activities in diaspora, literature of a "race",<sup>597</sup> can only burgeon in its homeland.

Evidently, Sirouni underlines the importance of the geographical centrality of the homeland in any form of cultural activity. It was the piece of land where Armenian efforts should be concentrated in the construction of the "nation". Only in that designated space could the palpable result of the cultural efforts be preserved. For Sirouni "it is especially bitter to throw the seed under foreign skies, far away from native homeland".<sup>598</sup> Therefore, the cultural, or in this particular case the literary efforts in diaspora would be wasted. This position stemmed from two reasons. Firstly, the homeland was the only geographical space where the sustainability of the Armenian identity was guaranteed. As he confides in exile, assimilation was a constant threat: "bit by bit, every day an evil mouth swallows us; it makes us forget the road that we came along; like a prostitute with make-up, it makes us forget the beautiful girl whom one day we left near the fountain of the village".<sup>599</sup> The contrasting metaphors of the urban prostitute and the village girl, or in other words vice and virtue, symbolise the set of values that out of their habitat were under threat of distortion.

Secondly, Sirouni cherishes the hope of a return to the "nascent homeland",<sup>600</sup> where "Armenian people congregate or will congregate one day from the four corners of the world".<sup>601</sup> It is important to notice that the host homeland was not the lost one but the one reborn from the ashes, namely Soviet Armenia. This was the final destination of Armenians where the construction efforts of the "nation", in this case in art and literature, would take

<sup>595</sup> See the following articles: *Hay Horizonen*, loc. cit., p. 189; *Hay Haroushn Ou Hay Kroghé*, loc. cit., p. 99; and, *Payts Voch Anishkhanoutiamp*, loc. cit., p. 300.

<sup>596</sup> See *Hay Horizonen*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 189.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> See *Shrchan Mé Pagelou Artiv* [On the Occasion of Closing an Era], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 12, July-August, p. 321, Bucharest, 1926.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> See *Payts Voch Anishkhanoutiamp*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 300.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

place. Sirouni had no ideological sympathy or political affiliation with Soviet Armenia; like Yesayan, his position was generated from an honest attachment to the idea of the homeland.

The reason of Sirouni's stance was based on the belief that in the Armenian diasporan communities, due to unfavourable circumstances, the expectations of cultural production would be modest. He states that individual talents in diaspora could fulfil their potential, but it would be impossible to produce the "genius of the race [...] on the inauthentic soil".<sup>602</sup> For Sirouni, only the homeland was capable of producing the genius who would synthesise the essential elements of Armenianness. The foreign environment could not provide for this, and in fact might diminish its likelihood. Having repatriation as an ultimate goal, the cultural endeavours of the diasporan Armenian communities should be designed to fill "the souls with faith".<sup>603</sup> By which he meant that the role of culture in general and literature in particular was for the purpose of maintaining Armenian identity in the faith that the day would come when all Armenians would congregate in their homeland. Sirouni's main purpose in disseminating Armenian literature, language and art in diaspora was for the maintenance of identity; the creation of works of art would be a difficult task to achieve because "the real beauty will bud there on the native soil".<sup>604</sup> Therefore, according to the understanding of Sirouni, Armenians in diaspora were on the cultural defensive, their role more preservationist rather than creative. Or it would be right to say that creativity in the communities had to match the demand of "ethnic" survival. The production of great works of art demand a corresponding environment, something which only the homeland could provide. For this reason Sirouni locates the emergence of the Armenian genius and/or the creation of the great work of art in the homeland. The fate of diasporan literature was linked to a geographical space that in reality did not exist.

Homeland-bound literature was one of the strands of the critical debates in *Nor Sharzhoum* between Tashian and Mkhitarian. In response to Tashian's remark as to whether it would be possible for him to see the Mount Masis<sup>605</sup> from his apartment in Cairo, Mkhitarian admits that geographically Armenians are far away from Masis, but that did not

<sup>602</sup> See *Hay Harousdn Ou Hay Kroghé*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 99.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Mount Masis is another name for the biblical Mount Ararat which is situated in nowadays Turkey near the border of the Republic of Armenia. It is revered by Armenians, since according to the biblical tradition Noah's Ark rested upon it after the flood. This fact gave the Armenians reason to link their genealogy to Noah's generation and viewed themselves as his descendants. Mount Ararat is engrained in the Armenian psyche; it symbolises everything that stands of Armenianness as well as the survival of the Armenian people. The fact of its being on the Turkish side of the border also symbolises grief for the lost homeland.

hinder the creative endeavour of Armenians, who were based out of the boundaries of the homeland. He gives the example of writers such as Tlgadintsi, Roupen Zartarian, Melkon Gyurjian (see Appendix), Ardashes Haroutyunian, Taniel Varouzhan, Siamanto and the Mkhitarist fathers (based in Venice and Vienna), who produced their characteristically Armenian literary texts far away from Masis. The secret of their success was that apart from being talented, they gave voice to the "soul of the people"<sup>606</sup> without wasting their talent in "useless wanderings".<sup>607</sup> According to Mkhitarian these writers did not live in the immediate vicinity of Masis, but they lived with the people of Masis.

Here it is worth recalling that most of the Mkhitarist fathers and all the mentioned writers were born and bred (at least until their late childhood) either in the homeland or in densely Armenian populated towns in Turkey. It seems that for the sake of his argument Mkhitarian took Tashian's remark literally, since none of these writers were from the immediate vicinity of Masis. The role of memory was vital in creating the image of the homeland in literature: it fills the gap that was left by the actual experience of no longer living there.

Mkhitarian does not deny the existence of the looming danger of becoming alienated from Armenianness. He cites the example of none other than Tashian, who acknowledges not having sufficient knowledge of the Armenian life; he who lived twenty years in the village, and during that period read barely twenty novels about French life, and claims better knowledge of the French life than the Armenian.

Garo Sasouni (see Appensix) adopted a similar position with its nationalist leaning. The centrality of the homeland in the creation of national literature, according to him, was not absolutely vital. Being geographically away from the homeland would not necessarily mean that the Armenian writer is deprived of the "breath and spirit of the homeland and people".<sup>608</sup> He states that in Armenia during seven years of Soviet rule (1920-1927), although the Armenian writers were in their natural habitat, the state of literature was abysmal, because they were unable to discover "the hidden, centuries-old spirit of the people".<sup>609</sup> He reaffirms that in terms of the creation of "national" literature, "the environment is of value, but not everything".<sup>610</sup>

<sup>606</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Azkayin Kraganoutian Hartsé (Jeshtoummer)*, loc. cit., p. 757.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> *Nor Kraganoutian Masin* [On the New Literature], Garo Sasouni, Part I, *Harach*, no. 558, 31<sup>st</sup> January, Paris, 1928.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

At the risk of repeating myself I have to bring to attention two points. Firstly, the idea of homeland-bound literature would not be helpful in the diaspora situation. If literary works can only be created in the homeland, the possibility of any development in the domain of literature is negated, because Armenians have been forced to live outside of it; this in turn leads to the problem of Armenians in diaspora being deprived of spiritual sanctuary through literature. Therefore, the “breath” of the people and the “hidden spirit” which allowed Armenians to survive for centuries would be vital elements in the reconstruction efforts of the “national” literature. Secondly, Sasouni and like-minded ideological comrades from the ARF party were facing the dilemma of promoting the idea of the homeland. On one hand, they had to keep alight the hopes of return to the homeland; on the other, they had to reject the idea of homeland-based literature. Literature inspired by the homeland was acceptable as long as the object of imagination was the lost homeland. But it would not be advisable to promote homeland-based literature, because in the absence of the lost homeland the attention would be focused on the tangible homeland, namely Soviet Armenia. In this case it could have negative implications; it would shift the attention of refugees to Soviet Armenia, which might also drive some writers to emigrate to Soviet Armenia, as was the case with Gosdan Zarian and Zabel Yesayan.

For Tashian as well, homeland had a vital role to play in the creation of Armenian literature. He asserted that peoples do migrate for various reasons or purposes and resettle in different places, where they strive to recreate an environment similar to the one that they left behind, but its impact will be ephemeral and will fade away generation after generation, because the recreation of the environment of homeland is artificial and soulless. When communities migrate, they cannot physically transport their surroundings (namely the nature, mountains, rivers, etc.) that constitute the vital elements of the makings of the “Armenian soul”. The implication of Tashian’s argument was clear: despite the existence of a popular base in diaspora the creation of “ethnic” literature would never be complete since the availability of one of the elements was irretrievably beyond reach. This would make the creation of “ethnic” literature almost impossible. He affirms that this was an historically proven fact that the assimilated Armenian communities in Transylvania and Poland, which not only failed to create an “ethnic” literature but could not preserve the one they inherited, lost “whatever was Armenian, [that bore the] Armenian stamp”.<sup>611</sup> Likewise, in the newly

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<sup>611</sup> See *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné* [Towards the Ethnic Literature], P. Tashian, Part I, *Nor Sharzhoum*, no. 48-49, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, p. 716, Cairo, 1924.

formed communities in diaspora Armenians will bear the influence of the elements of new environments, culturally, politically and economically. He claims that the Mkhitarist fathers were not able to sing about Mount Masis<sup>612</sup> as authentically as the people who lived in its immediate vicinity. Therefore, the possibility of creating "ethnic" literature in diaspora was unrealistic; that would be achieved when the Armenian people "returns to its habitat and restarts there the old life"<sup>613</sup>.

Tashian was saying that Armenian literature can only blossom in its homeland, in its own cultural environment, where many factors contribute to the exposition of "ethnic" markers through literature. In foreign lands the Armenian way of living and thinking will be influenced by local cultures. Time was also against the maintenance of Armenian identity; the more time passes the more future generations will be subjugated "to the foreign graft"<sup>614</sup> [*odar badvasdounin*], in other words, integration or assimilation was a real prospect.

Tashian tackles the issue of foreign influence by elucidating it in a very clear example, but first he poses one of the most important questions, which had not been raised in this discourse: Was the "ethnicity"<sup>615</sup> [*dohmigoutyun*] of literature in the "form"<sup>616</sup> [*tsev*] or in the "content" [*khork*]?<sup>617</sup> He states that the "ethnicity" of the "content" (subject matter) was more comprehensible, since it involves only the depiction of the Armenian life. In the case of "form", which is the "development of the "content" as Schopenhauer says",<sup>618</sup> the matter could be complicated. And, he continues, if we go a step further and we agree with Buffon's<sup>619</sup> interpretation that "the form, in other words the "style", is none other than the man",<sup>620</sup> then the quest for the "ethnic" values in the literary text becomes an intricate task.

The implication of Tashian's observation was clear: if style was the expression of human individuality, than its composition could be heterogeneous, influenced by many cultures, and could be susceptible to different ideologies and aesthetic undertakings. Exiled Armenian

<sup>612</sup> Masis or Ararat was the biblical mountain in the heart of historical Armenia (nowadays Turkey) upon which Noah's Ark was rested after the flood. It is revered by Armenians as a symbol of the eternity of the nation.

<sup>613</sup> See *Tebi Azkayin Kraganoutyun* [Towards National Literature], P. Tashian, *Hayasdani Gochmag*, no. 30, 26<sup>th</sup> July, p. 944, Boston, 1924.

<sup>614</sup> See P. Tashian, *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, Part I, loc. cit., p. 716.

<sup>615</sup> See P. Tashian, *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, Part II, loc. cit., p. 747

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid. The word *khork* literally means "ground", "base" or "floor", but it is also widely used to denote the "content" or the "subject matter" of literary texts.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Count George-Louis Leclerc Buffon (1707-1788), French naturalist, who on the occasion of his election in the Academie Française, delivered a speech entitled "Discours Sur le Style", in which he famously said "le style, c'est l'homme même" [style is the man himself].

<sup>620</sup> See P. Tashian, *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, Part II, loc. cit., p. 747.

writers would be subject to all these influences, and their literary production would be a testimony of the socio-political and cultural environment in which they were created. Now, where would this leave the future of the creation of “ethnic” literature? It seemed that its prospects for development were very grim. Here, the most important component for the maintenance of “ethnic” literature was the existence of the homeland, and its centrality in the creative imagination. The homeland was physically lost, and Armenian writers were still reeling from the trauma around the world, anchoring their creative endeavours in alien environments. The choice and the cultivation of “ethnic” life as literary subject matter was achievable, but it would prove very difficult to cast it in a certain “form” that would be compatible with the “ethnic” literary traditions. It was almost an unnatural task for the writers, since they had to betray their already formed individual creative identity for the sake of a substitute “ethnic” creative identity. Therefore, there were two disparate identities, which Tashian was not able to marry up.

Tashian tries to prove his claim that the “ethnic” character in literature - in other words the unique mode of “ethnic” literary expression - was very difficult to achieve in the absence of the homeland. As an example he says that love and sorrow are universal themes, but the modes of expression for those feelings by French and Armenians differ completely. Baudelaire and Verlaine equally expressed those feelings, as did the Armenians from Agn<sup>621</sup> in their poems called *Andouni*,<sup>622</sup> therefore, “the content or the subject matter”<sup>623</sup> of the literary production was the same, but they were the result of different cultural environments, and the individual input of the writers made each literary text unique in its own right. Unlike the people of Agn, whose creativity had evaporated out of their homeland, a new generation of French writers succeeded Baudelaire and Verlaine, thus securing the continuity of French poetic traditions. Therefore, Tashian’s implication was clear: the homeland was the centre and only guarantee of the continuity of creative production in terms of giving inspiration to the people of letters and providing the cultural and educational infrastructure.

Tashian’s remark was to the point: a decade earlier back in Armenia, rural people had sung their daily life, their mountains and the rivers, and they made sense of the world through the nature of their homeland; now everything had perished. He elaborated his argument by

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<sup>621</sup> Agn was a majority-Armenian inhabited settlement in Western Armenia, which was famous for its stunning nature and its oral poetic traditions. The two most acclaimed Western Armenian poets, namely Siamanto and Misak Medzarents were from Agn.

<sup>622</sup> *Andouni* or *Andouniner* were the oral poetic popular tradition of Agn.

<sup>623</sup> See P. Tashian, *Tebi Dohmig Kraganoutyuné*, loc. cit., Part II, p. 747.



citing the example of the most customary aspect of Armenian life, the traditional wedding. There was a whole culture connected to the wedding ceremony, including songs and customs, for example. He complains that European wedding customs, except for the ecclesiastical part, were already infiltrating Armenian wedding ceremonies.

He addresses a question to Mkhitarian, asking where the Armenian people in diaspora should take their inspiration: from “the pyramids of Egypt, the steppes of Russia, or from the degenerating environment of America and France”.<sup>624</sup> He likens the Armenian “nation” to the leaning tower of Pisa, and he asks what kind of “prop”<sup>625</sup> the Armenian “race”<sup>626</sup> should have in order to buttress its existence against “the centuries of distortion”.<sup>627</sup> Therefore, foreign influences were all detrimental, something which both protagonists accepted. But while Tashian accepts its inevitability in the current diaspora situation, Mkhitarian becomes a strong partisan for the efforts of repelling foreign values, which were incompatible with the endeavours of constructing the Armenian identity. Responding to Tashian, Mkhitarian reminds him that despite all the Earth’s tremors the tower of Pisa will not collapse, because its centre of gravity is in the spiral. Likewise, despite all the political upheavals the “leaning”<sup>628</sup> Armenian people will not collapse, because of the “national spirit”,<sup>629</sup> which was a “testament [...] from the forefathers”.<sup>630</sup> This sense of survival was an innate Armenian quality, a “prop”<sup>631</sup> against the collapse of the “nation”.

Yesayian also discussed the role of Armenian diasporan literature. She did not subscribe to the rejectionist attitude towards the literature that was beginning to gain ground in Armenian communities outside the borders of Soviet Armenia. The advocates of this attitude claimed that “good or bad”,<sup>632</sup> the literature of the diaspora was not worthy for consideration in the framework of “national” literature, because it had no crucial role to play in the development of Armenian literature. The reason for this kind of view towards diasporan Armenian literature lay in the perception that it was “uprooted, inauthentic and artificial”<sup>633</sup> and as a result it was consigned to oblivion.

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., p. 748.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., p. 747.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Azkayin Kraganoutian Hartsé (Jeshtoumner)*, loc. cit., p. 757.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Kragan Oughin*, loc. cit., p. 168.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

The three epithets for diasporan literature mentioned above encapsulate the all the tenets of this discourse. Being “uprooted” meant that the umbilical cord between diasporan literature and the homeland (which would constantly nourish the former) was cut off. The absence of the source of inspiration would debase creative efforts in the diaspora. As consequence it would become “inauthentic” and “artificial”, therefore, it would not have legitimacy in representing “ethnic” values. The urban character of diasporan literature was an inevitable prospect. Cities were part of Armenian socio-political and cultural life, therefore the interaction between Armenian identity and the metropolitan way of living would compose the bulk of experience with which the new literature would be created. Although Western Armenian literature was an urban phenomenon, produced in Constantinople and Smyrna, there were also scores of writers who cultivated rural literature. In the diaspora the rural literary traditions were continued by the generation who had the experience of living in rural Armenia. For the next literary generation this aspect of diasporan literature would be gone.

For some quarters of Armenian intellectuals this development of diasporan literature was unacceptable, because the Armenian islets in different cultural systems across the world would submerge without leaving any trace, as was the case with the Armenian communities in Poland and other settings. On the other hand, the promotion of rural literature (which itself would be “artificial” in the diasporan situation) would impart to the literary texts a unique “national” colour, which was a vital element for the construction of cultural identity. There were two rival criteria for the evaluation of the literary efforts.

In defence of diasporan literature, Yesayan stated that some factors condition the development of any society, such as geographical, political and others, which could differ from the conditions of other nations. Therefore, each society experiences a different developmental process and level. No matter how tough and unfavourable these conditions are, if they have “inner and hidden strength”<sup>634</sup> they will always find the way not only to adapt to them, but also to become stronger from the whole experience; in short they turn “the evil into good”<sup>635</sup>.

One considerable section of the Armenian people, continues Yesayan, has always lived outside homeland. They had a vibrant cultural life where, in foreign cultural climates, their worldview was shaped, emotional and intellectual faculties were enhanced, and reached a

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<sup>634</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

“certain level in civilisation”.<sup>636</sup> The vast geographical dispersion of Armenians contributed to the formation of deep interest towards various civilisations, which led to cultural interaction, thus enriching Armenian culture. Armenians in dispersion for centuries had internalised all the foreign values which they “found appropriate”<sup>637</sup> to their “collective spirit and various aptitudes”.<sup>638</sup> She concludes that “it is impossible to ignore that slowly and consistently stored moral richness”.<sup>639</sup>

Yesayan’s stance was clear: the cultural achievement of Armenians in dispersion cannot be overlooked as they are an integral part of the Armenian cultural heritage. It was possible to create Armenian cultural values out of the borders of the homeland, which would project the result of interaction of the Armenian culture with others. The internalisation of the appropriate elements of other cultures by Armenians in dispersion had positive consequences since they achieved intellectual adaptability in different cultural climates. They also set the selection criteria by which the Armenian intellect would sieve out the incompatible elements of other cultures. This would strengthen the bases of the Armenian culture. Unlike other critics and writers who were promoting cultural nationalism as a means of “ethnic” survival, she was celebrating the diversity of the diasporan Armenian culture, and promoting cultural openness.

#### *Becoming a “nation”*

Being deprived of homeland did not hinder the Armenians’ aspirations of becoming a “nation”. As I discussed earlier, not only did Armenians view themselves as a nation (see Introduction), but they also assumed a civilisational role (see Chapter Four), like the other nations, which would give them a dignified existence. This stateless “nation” was “unique”; it had spiritual dimension. The construction of Armenian cultural identity was heavily dependent on the idea of rebuilding that “nation”. That would be a massive boost to the collective self-confidence of Armenians in diaspora, which would be the basis for the production of works of cultural significance. This crucial idea of the “nation” re-emerges in the post-Genocide diaspora.

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

Mkhitarian's perception of Armenians as a "nation" is something worth taking into consideration. He evokes recent historical events which enhanced the Armenian identity, regardless of their social standing and political or cultural affiliation. There were two phases which had a great impact on the Armenian collective consciousness. First, it was the political struggles for liberation; he does not mention any specific event or timeframe, but the recent phase of the liberation movements was initiated by the emergence of the Armenian political parties from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From 1914 to 1918 during the Genocide there were pockets of Armenian self-defence, but the decisive battles took place in Sardarabad in 1918, when Armenians repelled the Turkish army. This leads us to the second reason, which was the immediate result of the 1918 victory, namely the birth of the independent Armenia. This event was a major factor in the enhancement of the "national" identity. At this juncture Mkhitarian makes a very remarkable observation, stating that all this political process transformed "the Armenian community to nationhood".<sup>640</sup> In 1928 Garo Sasouni talking about Armenians in diaspora makes a similar observation. He states that half of the Armenians live outside of Armenia, who are "more than something like *refugees*, they are a *nation*"<sup>641</sup> [writer's italics], and they are out of their homeland due to "*destruction*"<sup>642</sup> [writer's italics]. These masses which are dispersed around the world experience all the bitter episodes of recent Armenian history. Their consciousness absorbed those experiences, therefore, "*at least for now*"<sup>643</sup> [writer's italics] as a "nation" they are not a "lost fragment".<sup>644</sup>

There are some aspects of this argument which need to be explained. The historical experiences of the last decade fundamentally changed the worldview of Armenians as a political society, and they came to an age of maturity. To be a "nation" suggests a degree of organisation and purposeful existence. For the first time they realised that there were common causes around which they had to concentrate their concerted effort to reach a solution. They began to think like a "nation" and act as a "nation". Therefore, the idea of being a "nation" if not newly shaped is at least reinforced. Even if Armenians were dispersed around the world, they were not simply a community as they were in the Ottoman Empire, in France or the USA. Being refugees or a community of refugees was tantamount to

<sup>640</sup> See Kourken Mkhitarian, *Azkayin Kraganoutian Hartsé (Jeshtoumner)*, loc. cit., p. 757.

<sup>641</sup> See *Nor Kraganoutian Masin* [On the New Literature], Garo Sasouni, Part I, *Harach*, no. 558, 31<sup>st</sup> January, Paris, 1928.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

being in limbo, which was a source of uncertainty. This collective experience of the survivors will be the foundations of the “nation” for the coming generations, thus keeping the “ethnic” consciousness alight. It should be stressed yet again, this is not a geographically bound “nation” – its borders are limitless, because it is a culturally based “nation”. Having that said, the idea of “nation” also entails the hope of return to homeland, but until that time comes the regrouping around certain cultural values is paramount. Both writers who expressed these views had affiliations with the nationalist ARF party. Of course, this is not to say that there was a certain official attitude on a political level. Here, I simply intend to underline the fact. However, this attitude was sub-consciously linked to the political aspiration of creating a nation state, which was part of the project of the anti-Soviet Armenian camp.

*Diaspora as a permanent station*

At the end of the 1920s Sirouni shifts his position with regard to the feasibility of producing Armenian literature outside the boundaries of the homeland. It was prompted by a series of articles published by a writer called S. Sourian in *Hayrenik* newspaper<sup>645</sup> in which the writer advocated the idea that without the vital source of inspiration of homeland, it would be impossible to develop literature in diaspora. In response to Sourian, Sirouni, while giving great importance to the centrality of the homeland and the “soul of the race”<sup>646</sup> in the creative process, abandons his previously firmly held view that the homeland was the only “condition”<sup>647</sup> for the existence of a literature. He mentions three vital elements for the survival of the literature of “a race”:<sup>648</sup> the throb of life, the ability to be inspired, and creativity. As it is apparent, Sirouni accentuates the importance of the intervention of individuality in the creative process of literature. The three above-mentioned elements are the bases of individual creativity. Therefore, the homeland was not the vital element of creativity, and the stress shifted from the homeland to individual creative initiative. As an example he cited the fact that Armenian literature had always flourished in the urban centres outside of the homeland, namely in Constantinople, Smyrna, Tiflis and Baku. As for the

<sup>645</sup> See *Kaghoutahay Kraganoutyuné Yev Hayasdan* [The Armenian Émigré Literature and Armenia], S. Sourian, *Hayrenik* (newspaper), Part I, no. 4909, 23<sup>rd</sup> June; Part II, no. 4910, 24<sup>th</sup> June; Part III, no. 4911, 26<sup>th</sup> June; Part IV, no. 4912, 27<sup>th</sup> June; Part V, no. 4913, 28<sup>th</sup> June; Part VI, no. 4914, 29<sup>th</sup> June, Boston, 1928.

<sup>646</sup> See *Kaghouti Serount* [Émigré Generation], (Hagop) Sirouni, *Harach*, no. 735, 26<sup>th</sup> August, Paris, 1928.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

individual writers, Sirouni stressed that many of them produced the best part of their work outside of the homeland, such as Varouzhan (Venice and Belgium), Medzarents (Constantinople), Vahan Derian (see Appendix) (Moscow), etc.

In the current situation, Sirouni affirms, half of the Armenian people live outside of the homeland and a considerable number of writers and intellectuals are also settled in the communities, who “even on foreign lands do not abandon the racial culture”.<sup>649</sup> Therefore, having in mind the fact that in the future the diasporan communities will continue to exist, it is imperative to harness their enthusiasm and “propel them into collective effort”.<sup>650</sup> This was designed to reconstruct every domain of the Armenian life in the diasporan communities, because they have a great role to play. Here, Sirouni makes a remarkable observation, which was a change in his approach towards diaspora. He says that “not only will the economy of the native country [Soviet Armenia] expect support from the Armenian [diasporan] communities, but also that Armenian culture will suck on the sap and vigour of the Armenian communities”.<sup>651</sup>

Sirouni does not spell out this idea clearly, but his statement could be interpreted as follows. The diasporan communities had to be intellectually and spiritually self-sufficient. Their cultural endeavours would be a great contribution to Armenian culture in general, as well as it might impact on Soviet Armenian culture. If this was the case then the roles were reversed. Initially, according to Sirouni, the homeland was the source of the vital ingredient for the construction of Armenian cultural identity. Now it was the diasporan communities which had to preserve and enrich Armenian culture in dispersion. Moreover, the communities could be in position where they might administer the intellectual and spiritual needs to the homeland.

Sirouni acknowledges that the dispersion of Armenian communities around the world, at least for the time being, is unavoidable. And this was an important factor that could be harnessed for the preservation of the Armenian identity. He states that the homeland is much “sweeter”<sup>652</sup> on the foreign land than in the real homeland itself. Among the refugees in the diasporan communities “patriotism is more sincere”.<sup>653</sup> He states that the task of the

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<sup>649</sup> See (Hagop) Sirouni, *Inch Grna Dal Kaghouté*, loc. cit.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

diasporan writers is to capture the moments of the bursts of longing and materialise them into literary texts.

Therefore, the bottom line of Sirouni's argument was the idea that the Armenian communities in diaspora could be a breeding ground for the Armenian identity, based on the simple fact that people tend to value the thing that they left behind or lost. In this case, the actual homeland was absent, but the evocation of her image shrouded by nostalgia would generate an intense emotional magnetic field.

The two possible explanations for Sirouni's change of position could be attributed to the realisation on his part of the grave state of culture in the Armenian communities in diaspora. The people needed spiritual relief and any hope of help from the homeland was unrealistic, because for political reasons it was beyond reach – she was concealed behind the iron curtain of the Soviet regime. Therefore, the communities had to be culturally self-sufficient until favourable conditions allowed the return to homeland. The emergence of the new generation of diasporan writers from the mid-twenties onwards drove Sirouni to reassess his attitude towards diasporan literature, and he realised the dynamic role that the new generation can play in the maintenance of cultural identity.

Moreover, after a retrospective appraisal of Armenian literary history, Sirouni may have concluded that the urban centres have always been the places where the Armenian identity was forged. The diasporan communities could maintain the continuity of the same traditions by becoming new Constantinoples, Smyrnas and Tiflises. The exclusion of the Soviet homeland from this list was not explicitly articulated,<sup>654</sup> but between the lines one can easily read the message that the homeland was not in a position to sustain the “national” identity, because under Soviet ideology the “national” was a byword for regression and a reactionary stance. The Proletarian literature based on Communist ideology was the new religion of the young Soviet Armenian writers, while the literature based exclusively on “ethnic” values was the only viable option for the construction of identity for diasporan Armenians. In this context the Armenian communities had the role of injecting the much-needed “national” elements into Soviet Armenian culture.

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<sup>654</sup> With regard to Sirouni when he talks about the necessity of literature's disengagement from politics. He decries the number of poor quality poems dedicated to the freedom of Armenia and “the international revolution and its victory” (see *Inch Grna Dal Kaghouté*, loc. cit.). His criticism was levelled against both the “nationalist” and “internationalist” wings of the Armenian political movements, which promoted ideologically orientated literature (also see *Hay Harousdn Ou Hay Kroghé*, loc. cit., p. 99).

One of Sirouni's motives for giving prominence to the Armenian communities in the task of maintaining and promoting Armenian culture might be explained by an unarticulated belief that Armenian communities could serve as a window for Soviet Armenian culture, opened to the outside world. However, I have to emphasise that this argument was not spelt out at length.

For Nigoghos Sarafian, a member of the new generation of writers, there is no doubt about the geography of the new literature. He claims that his firm conviction that the work of a writer must be linked to reality compelled him to try persuading individual writers to avoid certain detrimental practices. He advises the Armenian writers not to nourish any "dream".<sup>655</sup> In the Armenian nationalist discourse the "dreams" have always been connected to the territorial aspirations of Armenians (see Chapter One). In nationalist political circles, repossession of the lost homeland was one of their main political objectives. He affirms that all the Armenian people in dispersion have two priorities: obtaining "immediate material"<sup>656</sup> support, and "adaptation to the locality".<sup>657</sup> The promotion of nationalist ideas could cause disharmony between the host and Armenian cultures; it could create an atmosphere of nostalgic longing, which would hinder the Armenians' readjustment efforts.

In this context Sarafian exhorts writers "to cling to the soil of the émigré Armenian communities".<sup>658</sup> It is the first time that the idea of clinging to the "soil" of émigré communities emerges. To cling to somewhere could suggest a temporary state, always looking for stable footholds. In the context of Sarafian's arguments this was not the case. On the contrary, clinging to the communities in the host countries would mean embracing them as a "soil" in the absence of the homeland; to aspire for the lost homeland would mean to become entangled in the harmful web of "dreams". If for Sirouni the diasporan communities were temporary places, for Sarafian they were permanent. This was the early stage in the formation of the idea that the diaspora is a permanent place for émigré Armenians that can substitute the homeland. Therefore, the "soil" of diasporan communities substituted the homeland.

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<sup>655</sup> See *Mdadzoumner* [Reflections], Nigoghos Sarafian, *Harach*, no. 568, 11<sup>th</sup> February, Paris, 1928.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Seven

### A New Generation

#### Introduction

The new generation of post-Genocide diasporan writers raised hopes for the continuity of Western Armenian literature. In any society especially in the domain of arts the transitional period between two generations is marked by contradicting philosophical, aesthetic and socio-political views both of the young generation bursting on to the literary scene and the old generation who are driven from it. The same dynamics apply to the Armenian case. The change of guard in Armenian literature was no different from most other cases in other societies. The idea of sharing literary space with the newcomers was seen by the literary elite as a concession not only of their generational rights of leadership, but also of the promotion of their own literary values.

There was general haste among the ranks of the old generation, which was generated by panic. In the wake of the Genocide there was a sense of losing direction and there were urgent issues concerning the fate of Armenians that needed to be addressed. Although the old generation was adamant to steer the direction of literature in diaspora, they were also aware of the fact that in the post-Genocide situation the small number of intellectuals in diaspora made things worse. The construction of an intellectual infrastructure needed architects; in the absence of the Genocide victim-intellectuals, faces turned to the new generation. What they found was a generation reeling from the immense pain of loss, which had not entered the phase of maturity in order to face the challenges of the new world (the eldest members of this generation in 1925 were in their late twenties). For example, in the mentioned year, Shoushanian was 22 and Sarafian was 23.

This created unhealthy tensions on the literary scene with the older generation criticising new writers for their literary immaturity and young writers defending themselves and attacking at the same time. Trading insults was commonplace and the intellectual arguments and personal bickering were part of the tradition. Political affiliations also played an

important part in the relations between the two generations. In the absence of a culture of political tolerance, the personal attacks were sometimes motivated by ideological differences. The personal relations between the writers from both camps were another factor that played an important part in this discourse. The rancour and the aversion poisoned the intellectual atmosphere, leaving no room for serious aesthetic and literary debate.

In the Armenian case, these debates were taking place in the unique post-Genocide situation. This added an extra dimension to the discussed issues and in the relations between the two generations. There were tough challenges ahead; therefore, as far as the elite were concerned, a generation that would display a high degree of responsibility and be acutely conscious of the forthcoming battles was in high demand. High expectations needed a corresponding response. The main critical issue was the construction of the future Armenian cultural identity. The conflict was about the composition of that identity and there were differences between the approaches of the old and new generations. The old generation who grew up in the homeland solely promoted Armenianness in cultural productions. Meanwhile the newcomers who grew up in exile in varying environments were adamant about hybridising the Armenian literature of diaspora. The new generation of writers came on to the scene in very difficult historical circumstances: a) the political turmoil and economic deprivation made their life a struggle for survival; b) the sense of loss left a scar on the new writers' individuality since they had to make sense of the tragedy of their lives in the dark corners of orphanages; c) lack of access to a stable education; d) there was explicit acknowledgment, even by some of the fiercest critics of the new generation, of the bitter experience that they had endured. The old generation appraised the hesitant steps of the newcomers with a degree of extra vigour, criticising them on a variety of aesthetic and literary issues.

The criticisms and accusations levelled against the new generation of writers from the early 1920s triggered the backlash of the young writers. It began around 1925, when the young Armenian writers found the strength to flex their intellectual muscle in order to defend their principles and to make their voice heard. Their entrance on to the literary scene was closely linked to the printed press, especially the publications of *Harach* (Paris) and *Navasart* (Bucharest), which became their main platforms. Their critical judgments matched the harsh criticism of their elders. In this chapter, the focus will be on the two leading representatives

of the new generation of writers, namely Vazken Shoushanian<sup>659</sup> and Nigoghos Sarafian. The reason for the choice of these writers was not random. They were two of the few writers who not only defended their generation, but also propounded their different personal views on the future direction of diasporan literature. After all the propositions and advice from the old generation about the future direction of literature, it was the turn of the young writers to discuss the path they intended to take.

What makes this debate significant is the fact that it represents two already entrenched trends in diasporan literary criticism: the inward move, namely the nationalist tendencies of excluding or at least minimising the alien elements in literature, and the outward move, which intended to hybridise diasporan Armenian literature with local cultures, especially European elements.

### **The appraisal of the seniors**

#### ***Reproaches and advice***

##### *Arrogance*

The most commonly heard accusation of the old generation against the new writers is the cherished attitude of arrogance towards the past, and anything or anybody related to it. This attitude of the new generation has its reason. Except for the fact that the old symbolises the past, it was also a source of immeasurable pain. It was the story of political failure that resulted in tragedy. The main players of that role in the past were the members of the old generation, who were seen as incompetent. This attitude was more pervasive in the circles of independent writers since the ones who had political affiliations were more careful in their criticism because their political parties were part of that past. Of course, pretentiousness is the trademark of the novel endeavours and part of the self-asserting efforts by the newcomers. During this process, the literary authority of the old generation would be

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<sup>659</sup> On Vazken Shoushanian see *Vazken Shoushanian* (collective work, no editor mentioned), Paris, 1942; *Vazken Shoushanian (Gyankn Ou Esdeghdzakordzoutyuné)* [Vazken Shoushanian (The Life and Works)], Kegham Sevan, Yerevan, 1968; *Vazken Shoushanian, Khosk Mahvan 25 Amiagin* [Vazken Shoushanian, Speech on 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death], K. Attarian, Beirut, 1966.

challenged and the appraisal of their literature could result, justly or unjustly, in the demolition of their credibility.

In the diaspora, the arrogance of the young writers was vehemently decried by the old generation. In 1926 in the literary journal *Arakadz*, Ardashes Hovhannesian<sup>660</sup> criticised the new writers for their lack of respect towards the victim-writers of the Genocide and their lack of gratitude to the old writers, who were on the forefront facing the challenges of diasporan life. Ardashes Hovhannesian's other accusation was the inability of the new generation to assess the seriousness of the situation they were living in; they did not realise the extent of the "catastrophe"<sup>661</sup>, namely the Genocide. Especially, they did not understand the enormity of the cultural loss. Even they do not have the clarity of mind in order to observe and evaluate life.

Zabel Yesayian, another member of the old generation, takes a softer line, acknowledging that during transitional periods of generations, "cruelty"<sup>662</sup> and "injustice"<sup>663</sup> usually shown by the new writers towards their previous generation are part of the game. This is designed to give them "agility"<sup>664</sup> in their quest for the "new horizon",<sup>665</sup> and also to construct their future by their own efforts. However, Yesayian shows utter contempt towards some elements of the new writers, blaming them for "boldness which reaches to arrogance and insolence".<sup>666</sup> However, she differentiates between constructive and destructive boldness, one originating from innovative effort, and the other being the result of ignorance. Sirouni also joins the chorus of the criticism for the arrogance displayed by the new writers.<sup>667</sup>

The unfriendly approach of the old generation was unconstructive as much as the arrogance of the juniors. Here the key point is that the elders did not sufficiently appreciate the sacrifices and loss that the young writers had experienced. Their immaturity has not always been seen as a natural phase in their literary careers.

<sup>660</sup> Ardashes Hovhannesian was a French-Armenian intellectual.

<sup>661</sup> See *Mer Nor Kroghneré* [Our New Writers], Ardashes Hovhannesian, *Arakadz*, no. 6, 15<sup>th</sup> March, p. 8, Paris, 1926.

<sup>662</sup> See *Mshdnchenagan Esgesnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté* [Eternal Novices and the Real New Generation], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 62, 4<sup>th</sup> April, Paris, 1926.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> See *Noreroun Arhamarhanké* [The Contempt of the New Writers], (Hagop) Sirouni, *Harach*, no. 771, 7<sup>th</sup> October, Paris, 1928.

### *Their Labels*

Derogatory and colourful expressions were part of this discourse, showing the extent of the animosity between some of these writers in both camps. In this respect Yesayan's imagination was quite colourful. She labels some of the new writers as "newly grown brats",<sup>668</sup> "appendix",<sup>669</sup> "useless parts",<sup>670</sup> "emaciated novices",<sup>671</sup> and "miserable teenagers".<sup>672</sup> Even the animal kingdom served as a point of comparison to Ardashes Hovhannesian, since he likened the young writers to "locusts",<sup>673</sup> and their vociferous arguments to the "croaking of the frogs".<sup>674</sup>

Here, at the risk of repeating myself, I would like to underline the fact that some of this criticism was rooted in personal and political grounds. The unconventional mode typical of Armenian debate should also be noted.

### *Lack of knowledge*

#### *Sophistication*

I briefly talked about the lack of sophistication of the new writers in the literary domain (see Chapter Six). Here I would like to flesh out some of these issues. In the debates concerning the literary knowledge of the new writers, Nshan Desdegyul was one of their fiercest critics. He affirmed that the young writers did not have the necessary grounding to play a leading role in the continuity of Armenian literature,<sup>675</sup> and, therefore, their literary production was deprived of the essential aesthetic framework. He listed a litany of flaws, such as "bad taste, deformity, sentimentalism, worn out literary methods, [...] clumsy

<sup>668</sup> See *Tebi Our Gertan* [Where are they Going?], Zabel Yesayan, *Yerevan*, no. 65, 11<sup>th</sup> April, Paris, 1926.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> See Zabel Yesayan, *Mshdnchenagan Esgsnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit. It must be noted that the target of Yesayan's contempt was the new writers of political rival camp. However, it is still shows the level of the animosity between two generations.

<sup>673</sup> See Ardashes Hovhannesian, *Mer Nor Kroghneré*, loc. cit., p. 8.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> See *Diroché Aykiyin Mech* [In the Vineyard of the Lord], Nshan Desdegyul, *Hayrenik* (monthly) Part I, no. 9 (33), July, p. 37, Boston, 1925.

copying of foreign literatures",<sup>676</sup> which characterised the recent literary output of the new writers.

Another accusation levelled by Desdegyul against them concerned their limited knowledge of life and humanity. He encourages the writers to scrutinise human beings – starting with themselves – and their milieu from their "own observatory".<sup>677</sup> During these observations they have to develop a unique way of looking at both, so that they will have "special methods to interpret and express the essence of life and the fate of human being".<sup>678</sup> In order to achieve this, he continues, the writers must broaden their knowledge in the social, moral and emotional domains, especially the last two, which were never scrutinised by the previous generation.

He stratified the new writers of Armenian literature into two categories: those who were satisfied with expressing their "infantile",<sup>679</sup> experience and who did not pay any attention and care to the "cultural value of literature and art",<sup>680</sup> and those who did not possess the much-needed experience they would acquire by acute observation and deep analysis of surroundings. Instead, they borrowed the experience of others. That was the reason why such writers lacked "depth",<sup>681</sup> and "uniqueness",<sup>682</sup> in their literary works. Desdegyul asserted that literature was the "aesthetic viewpoint on life and human beings",<sup>683</sup> therefore, there were only two directions for the young writers to follow: either face the complexity of life by "giving shape, colour and meaning to it",<sup>684</sup> through creative endeavour, or eschew the creative life altogether.

Yesayan also criticises a number of writers for their inability to enter a stage of literary maturity. Thus, she divides the new generation of writers into two categories: the "real new generation",<sup>685</sup> and the "eternal novices".<sup>686</sup> The first category included those new writers for whom inexperience was a temporary, transitional period before literary maturity and the second category were the writers for whom immaturity was a permanent state. Yesayan's

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<sup>676</sup> See *Diroché Aykiyin Mech*, Nshan Desdegyul, *Hayrenik*, Part III, no. 12 (36), October, p. 53, Boston, 1925.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>683</sup> See *Diroché Aykiyin Mech*, Nshan Desdegyul, *Hayrenik*, Part IV, no. 2 (38), December, p. 64, Boston, 1925.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.* See Zabel Yesayan, *Mshdichenagan Esgsnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*

implication was clear: it was vital for the new writers to enter the phase where it required the disciplined and organised employment of their intellectual faculties.

The criticism of the old generation on this matter stemmed from panic. There was no question about the literary immaturity of young writers at all. In order to put things in perspective it is important to note that many of the first literary works of new generation were published from 1927-1928 onwards. Due to unnatural circumstances of the early period of life of the young writers, there was a delay from the transition to the phase of maturity.

### *Language*

The mastery of the Armenian language by new writers was one of the most debated issues. Nshan Desdegyul accused the new generation of writers of having a poor command of the Armenian language. He emphasised that to master a language was beyond having mere knowledge in grammar. It was the ability to master its dynamics, its semantics, idiomatic expressions, rhythm, musicality and every possible nuance, which make the language a unique means of expression. Moreover, the writers had to discover the influence of the “unique racial and national psychology”<sup>687</sup> on the language. In Desdegyul’s view, language was more than a mere tool of expression, it was the key to decoding what was referred to in this discourse as “Armenian soul” (see Chapter Five). It was a vital means in the construction of the Armenian identity of a literary work. In the case of misuse it could distort that quintessentially Armenian image.

Sirouni, who was more sympathetic towards the new writers than the other critics, criticised them not only for their poor command of the Armenian language, but also for having a contemptuous attitude towards it. He branded their language as “deformed”<sup>688</sup> and “unbearable”.<sup>689</sup> He likened Armenian literature to a garden without guardians where the young writers were entering “barefoot”.<sup>690</sup> He stated that there was a misconception among the new generation of writers as to what constituted a unique writer. Their approach was that originality consisted in misusing the language, while according to him it consisted of finding an innovative means of expression. The issue of the language haunted Sirouni for some time;

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>688</sup> (Hagop) Sirouni, *Noreroun Arhamarhanké*, loc. cit.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

he published other articles dedicated to this subject, indicating its declining quality.<sup>691</sup> H. Nalpantian also exhorted the writers to master the Armenian language.<sup>692</sup> Shavarsh Misakian, the editor of *Harach*, was legendary for his care towards the Armenian language, and that attitude was one of the criteria against which new literary works were judged.

It is worth repeating that many of the young writers were self-educated and did not have higher education mainly due to the lack of Armenian educational institutions in the wake of the Genocide and to the pervasive poverty of the refugees in the new communities. This lack of linguistic sophistication was reflected especially in the literary or non-literary texts in the printed press, which was full of linguistic mistakes and inaccuracies.

### *Style and technique*

Another aspect of the literary production of the new generation was their style and literary techniques. Desdegyul dwells upon this issue, stating that the style, viewed as the vital element of any literary production, is completely disregarded by the new generation. As a result he affirms that the “*individuality*”<sup>693</sup> [writer’s italics] of the writers in their literary works was diminished. Desdegyul was raising a crucial point, which was the accentuation of style in literary production, because it was the manifestation of the writer’s individuality.

According to Zabel Yesayian, although the new generation was energetic and had the creative drive to initiate a new era in Armenian literature, they lacked the proper skills to translate their emotions and thoughts into literary works. She diagnosed some of the aesthetic flaws as follows: a) lack of knowledge of the “writing craft”;<sup>694</sup> b) insufficient command of the Armenian language; c) “carelessness [...] clumsiness [and] ignorance”<sup>695</sup> when it comes to the stylisation of their literary works; d) the quest for new avenues in literature must not be mistaken for “undirected wanderings and hesitations”.<sup>696</sup> She states that her observations were based on the literary materials that she was receiving from new generation of writers as a literary editor of the periodical *Yerevan*. According to Sirouni, one of the main culprits of the linguistic and aesthetic mayhem in the literary productions of the new writers was the

<sup>691</sup> Also see the following articles by Sirouni on the same subject: *Papeloné Mer Lezvin Mech* [The Babylon in our Language], *Harach*, no. 777, 14<sup>th</sup> October, Paris, 1928, and *Chariké Meghmelou Hamar* [In Order to Lessen the Evil], *Harach*, no. 783, 21<sup>st</sup> October, Paris, 1928.

<sup>692</sup> See H. Nalpantian, *Hay Kraganoutian Oughin*, loc. cit., p. 41.

<sup>693</sup> See Nshan Desdegyul, *Diroché Ayktyin Mech*, Part III, loc. cit., p. 51.

<sup>694</sup> See *Vaghvan Houniské* [The Harvest of Tomorrow], Zabel Yesayian, *Yerevan*, no. 98, 27<sup>th</sup> June, Paris, 1926.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.



printed press for not exercising stringent control over the published materials and for giving a platform to the untalented writers.

As I mentioned above this was the early stage in the formation of the literary individuality of the young writers; therefore, their style had no distinct features. As for their writing technique, it was something that they had to improve over a period of time. The criticism of Sirouni was well founded. The editors of the printed press were to blame for the carelessness in the printed literary texts: as the guarantors of the high standards of the printed literary materials, they did not exercise strict control. This was prompted by the constant concern for filling the pages of the journals and newspapers. Except for practical concerns, another reason was the lenient attitude of editors towards young writers. This attitude was based on the good will of encouragement, something which filled the literary arena with mediocrities. The other fact of the existence of numerous mediocre new writers was the scarce number of the old writers – for known reasons – who would lead them and set the aesthetic criteria and would exercise them in their literary works.

### *Reading literature*

Although the literary nourishment of the new generation was of paramount importance, the lack of financial resources of Armenians in the diaspora hindered the promotion of reading or buying books (see Chapter Three). Nevertheless, the new generation was not exempt from criticism in this matter.

Mgrdich Barsamian calls attention to the fact that a considerable number of young writers had not read the Armenian writers of the past thirty years. In this sense he appreciates the efforts of the literary group of *Hartkogh* in Paris in promoting the literature of the previous generation.<sup>697</sup> On the other hand, Desdegul urges them to read and examine the literature of other writers, which was no more than a different point of view on life experience.<sup>698</sup> The reason behind his concern was clear: to encourage the young writers to enhance their knowledge on certain issues and broaden their worldview.

<sup>697</sup> See *Noreroun Veratartsé* [The Return of the New Writers], Mgrdich Barsamian, *Harach*, no. 220, 26<sup>th</sup> December, Paris, 1926.

<sup>698</sup> See Nshan Desdegul, *Diroché Aykiyin Mech*, Part III, loc. cit., p. 55.

*Inherited flaws*

There were accusations levelled against the new writers for inheriting the unhealthy literary traditions of Western Armenian literature. Although the continuity was generally viewed as a positive development, some traits were heavily criticised. Yesayan states that the new generation of writers are the inheritors of the “pathological weakness”<sup>699</sup> of Western Armenian literature. According to her, the reason for this enervated state was the Constantinople literary education of the Western Armenians, which was characterised by its attachment to the external form of literary works rather than their substance. She pinpointed that the writers in Constantinople viewed creativity as mere wordplay, a trend which resulted in literary works being characterised by their “poverty of thought, absence of psychological insight and inaptitude [to convey] authentic and direct impressions”.<sup>700</sup>

The criticism of Western Armenian literature on its lack of substance was a mantra in Western Armenian and diasporan literary criticism. As with previous ones, this time there was not a single example in order to corroborate it. I will not enter into the debate concerning literary education in the schools of Constantinople since this is beyond the scope of my thesis, although I must note that after Armistice in 1918 until the capture of the city by Kemalists in 1922, many diasporan young writers received their education in Constantinople, such as Nigoghos Sarafian, Shahan Shahnour, Zareh Vorpouni and others. Apart from that, most of them were the inheritors of Western Armenian literary traditions. As for the accusation that Western Armenian literature was “wordplay”, it must be noted that as a result of literary endeavours of the previous generation the Western Armenian language conquered the highest peaks. Beauty, rhythm, musicality and agility were its main characteristics, these traits applying especially to poetry. The poetic language of Varouzhan and Medzarents was the benchmark against which the literary works were judged. The same applies to the language of the prose writer Oshagan and Yesayan herself.

Nshan Desdegyul also dwells upon the impact of the previous generation of writers on the new. Talking about poetry, he accuses the new writers of living “in a reminiscent mould” [*reminiscent gaghabari mé mech*]<sup>701</sup> inherited from the previous generation. He does not spell out his meaning, but it is not difficult to pinpoint his allusion. His criticism was well

<sup>699</sup> See Zabel Yesayan, *Kragan Oughin*, loc. cit., p. 169.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>701</sup> See Nshan Desdegyul, *Diroché Aykiyin Mech*, Part III, loc. cit., p. 57.

founded – the evocation of the past was one of the main traits of not only Armenian poetry but also other genres. He also talks about the technical side of the issue, criticising the new writers like their predecessors for emphasising a literary work's “plot”,<sup>702</sup> over its “motivation”.<sup>703</sup>

His remark was apposite, since in Western Armenian prose the characters of literary work were not cultivated at length, their motivation for action not fully displayed or analysed. In other words, their psychological state was not treated in detail, as should be the case in any construction of literary characters. Yeroukhan<sup>704</sup> was one of the first few writers in the pre-Genocide period who to a certain extent tried to break the mould by submerging himself in the psychological mazes of his characters; this especially applies to his masterpiece novel *Amirayin Aghchigé* [The Daughter of Amira] (published in Constantinople in 1910). This is equally applicable to some of the young writers of diasporan Armenian literature as is the case with the French-Armenian writer Zareh Vorpouni's<sup>705</sup> first autobiographical novella *Haladzvadzneré (Portsé)* [The Persecuted (The Attempt)] (1929), which has technical flaws in terms of an inadequate cultivation of plot and characters. By reading it, one gets the impression that it is the product of an immature writer.

Another inherited flaw was repetition. Yesayan decries some writers for not being innovative, and blames them for the reproduction of the “mouldy old”,<sup>706</sup> [*mkłodadz hiné*] and “dead past”,<sup>707</sup> of the previous generation; she labels such writers as “reactionary”.<sup>708</sup> It would not be a new thing to say that repetition is a major impediment to the developmental process of any kind of art form. Novelty is the lifeline of the continuity between the past and the present; therefore, every generation in the domain of art has a duty to contribute to the construction of the literary tradition. In the early 1920s, it was an established trend of some new writers to emulate the senior generation of Western Armenian literature. This was most apparent in poetry, where Varouzhan, Medzarents and Siamanto were the main figures of admiration.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Yeroukhan (1870-1915), a Western Armenian prose writer, was a victim of the Armenian Genocide.

<sup>705</sup> On Vorpouni see *Mard*, Krikor Bldian, pp. 293-342, Antelias, 1997.

<sup>706</sup> See Zabel Yesayan, *Mshdnchenagan Esgsnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

*Ideological indoctrination*

The ideological indoctrination of the new writers triggers the onslaught of Zabel Yesayan. She dwells upon one of the statements of Shavarsh Misakian, according to which he criticises the isolationist attitude of the new generation of Armenians. She states that Misakian (who was a member of the ARF party) and his ideological friends were to blame for the inclination towards the isolationist attitude of the new writers, because they imbued the youth with “unachieved dreams which belong to the past”.<sup>709</sup> The “dreams” in question was in the shape of “a non-existent and illusionary motherland (from sea to sea)”,<sup>710</sup> namely the homeland which was left behind. In the nationalist discourse of the ARF party, the homeland symbolised the grievance of loss and it was a stimulant of struggle. This of course was not in line with Yesayan’s pro-Soviet Armenia political stance. According to her literature, which was rooted in this kind of “poor and pathological ideology”,<sup>711</sup> of course, it would have a detrimental effect. It would marginalise the young writers and would prevent them from being part of the developmental processes of society. She likens the new generation gathered around the ARF party to a person talking in a deep sleep, while they have the chance to “open [their] eyes in the glittering light of fresh morning”.<sup>712</sup> In Yesayan’s politically inspired imagery the “lights” and “fresh mornings” were undoubtedly connected to the impeccable image of Soviet Armenia.

From the facts given above it is clear there was a conflict between two homelands: the lost one cherished by the anti-Soviet section of the diaspora, namely the ARF party, and the homeland that was just beginning to breathe life, namely Soviet Armenia, which was supported by the pro-Soviet section of the diaspora. Literature which originates from a “non-existent” homeland will be a source of unhealthy existence in the imaginary world; this will lead to the self-isolation of the new writers, depriving them of the cultural openness that Misakian was promoting. Yesayan regards the new generation as victims of this “degenerated” ideology. The nationalist motto “from sea to sea Armenia” (see Chapter One for an explanation of this phrase) was the trademark of the ARF territorial imagination, a dream which one day they still hope to realise.

<sup>709</sup> See Zabel Yesayan, *Kragan Paghtsankner*, loc. cit.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

In another article, Yesayian repeats her accusations over the issue of the indoctrination of the young writers. She criticises the publishers of the Athens-based periodical *Kraser* [Bibliophile] the literary supplement to the newspaper *Nor Or* [New Day], who in addition to their arrogance are “suppressed [...] by a negative political project”.<sup>713</sup> The newspaper *Nor Or* was the official organ of the ARF party; therefore, the political project in question was the nationalist ideology of the above-mentioned party.

Yesayian cannot tolerate the contempt shown against the regime in Soviet Armenia and its literary production. For instance, the young publishers of *Kraser* expressed their loathing for contemporary Soviet-Armenian literature. Yesayian lambastes all who dare to criticise the new generation of Soviet-Armenian writers, whom she labels a “healthy and brave generation”.<sup>714</sup>

This was a biased attitude. She was blinded by the political animosity that she had towards the ARF party; most of the victims of her criticism were the writers who had close affiliation with the party. Evidently, she was employing two different yardsticks in the evaluation of the literary generations within and out of the homeland. She blamed the ARF party for pursuing a “negative political project”; even in her day it was widely known that the literature of Soviet Armenia was tailored according to the Soviet ideology in the form of Proletariat literature. Because of this constant interference by the Soviet authorities in literature, the quality of the literary production was abominable.

An important point that grabs one’s attention is Yesayian’s enigmatic attitude towards Soviet-Armenian literature. She never built a convincing argument in defence of Soviet-Armenian literature, which would justify its principles on aesthetic grounds. She was acutely aware of the fact that literature in Soviet Armenia was used to promote the Communist ideology, but her political conviction was superior to her aesthetic principles.

Although she presented a robust stance on the defence of Soviet Armenia and her literary generation, Yesayian never encouraged the diasporan writers to emulate the literary production of Soviet Armenia. In this context she identifies a strand in diasporan literature which was dedicated, as she put it, to “our country and her new life”.<sup>715</sup> Ironically, she records this fact with cautious sympathy, indicating that this is “a new kind of romanticism”,<sup>716</sup> which originates from “an uncertain longing for homeland and a vague

<sup>713</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Tebi Our Gertan*, loc. cit.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Vaghvan Hountské*, loc. cit.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

ideology”.<sup>717</sup> Instead she enjoins the young writers to portray the realities of the “Armenian émigré life”,<sup>718</sup> thus uncovering the new face of the Armenian way of life. According to Yesayan, this was the best way to serve Armenian literature, and this was the only way to reach out to the new generation of writers in Soviet Armenia. However, in this particular case she admonished the diasporan young writers not “to cast their thoughts in [...] the moulds”<sup>719</sup> of Soviet-Armenian literature. She also advocated the building of literary links between diasporan and Soviet-Armenian literatures, which would be the result of their own experiences. This exchange of experiences would give insight into each environment, thus contributing to mutual understanding.

I would like to make one general comment with regard to the evaluation of the literary production of the young writers. The criticism against them by the older critics was very general and they did not provide examples to corroborate their claims. In other words, it was not literary text-based criticism (except Yesayan’s criticism of *Kraser*). Although the diagnosis in general terms were right but they were not endemic. In fact, there were many young writers of varying literary calibres.

### **Encouragement and justification**

#### *Sympathy*

The most vocal sympathiser with the new breed of writers was Hagop Sirouni. Despite his previous criticism, he takes a softer line by not laying the whole blame on them for their inadequate level of sophistication. He acknowledges that they went through very tough times, especially during the formative years of their individual and creative character. “First they did not have a teacher. [...] Our lads grew up by their own, by wandering from one city to another, from one school to another”.<sup>720</sup> They came to have, he continues, the suffering and the pain of life only, without having the chance of conventional spiritual and intellectual growth. Some of them exercised hard self-discipline and acquired barely sufficient knowledge of how to employ literary tools to express themselves.

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> See (Hagop) Sirouni, *Noreroun Arhamarhanké*, loc. cit.

Sirouni's evaluation was right, unlike other critics he had a more humane and unbiased attitude towards the new writers, especially towards the ones who had a glare of talent. He showed deep understanding towards their situation, and he expressed sympathy for the mental and psychological suffering that they had endured.

He goes much further in justifying the criticism of the new writers against the previous generation. He considers their dissatisfaction towards the current "mouldy [literary] environment",<sup>721</sup> as a vital element for the reconstruction of literary life, because this kind of attitude "will lay the foundation of the new edifice".<sup>722</sup> Here, Sirouni underlines the essential principle that dissatisfaction is the basis of any change in the field of art. He also states that their radical views and appraisal of literary figures and works stems from their sincerity. It is important to remember that the older generation were not only criticised by the new generation for their sincerity. As I noted above, there were other dynamics, such as political affiliation and personal relationships.

Sirouni not only morally, but also practically supported the new writers by opening the doors of his literary periodical *Navasart* (Bucharest) to them. He provided a special section entitled "flowers which are blossoming", where he published their first literary works. He even gave a platform to their controversial critical views through a series of interviews conducted by the young writer Vazken Shoushanian.

Barsamian also apologetically enunciates the unfavourable conditions within which the new generation had grown up. He says that in their teens they were forced to leave school and to join either the caravans of deportees or the guerrilla fighters.<sup>723</sup> Another father figure was Shavarsh Misakian, whose newspaper's doors were wide open to talented new writers.

### *Optimism*

Despite all the aesthetic flaws and linguistic shortcomings of the new writers, there was well-founded optimism among the critics for the promising future state of diasporan literature.

<sup>721</sup> See *Prgarar Tzhkohoutyuné* [The Saving Dissatisfaction], editorial, *Navasart*, no. 10, April, p. 274, Bucharest, 1926.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> See Mgrdich Barsamian, *Noreroun Veratartsé*, loc. cit.

No matter how harsh Zabel Yesayian's criticism towards new writers, she was still sanguine on the emergence of a new type of literature.<sup>724</sup> According to her assessment, the new generation is already showing the signs of a healthy literature, and she concludes that "the harvest of tomorrow will be abundant and beautiful".<sup>725</sup>

Sirouni heralds the arrival of the new generation of writers by posing the rhetorical question "don't you hear the footfall of the novices?"<sup>726</sup> He confides that the efforts of the previous generation to draw the future direction of literature were futile, because of Armenian literature's lack of unique characteristics. He affirms that now there is a new generation, which is adamant to find the "physiognomy"<sup>727</sup> of Armenian literature. He advocates the idea of giving the essential creative space to the writers in order to find their own creative direction – it will be impossible to create a literature with forced principles.<sup>728</sup>

The disassociation of the new generation from their predecessors was extremely important in order to set sail on their own literary journey. In this sense Nshan Desdegyul urged the new generation of writers to get rid of "old fetters",<sup>729</sup> allowing them to enter new unexplored territories. This disassociation from the past would also enable them to observe "the new and advanced modes of life, and the new palpitations and movements of the human soul".<sup>730</sup>

Therefore, as far as innovation was concerned, Desdegyul's two priorities were, first, the discovery of new viewpoints for observing outside reality, and second, to observe closely the spirituality of humans. In other words, the psychological analysis of human characters and their aesthetisation in a literary work was to be the new challenge of the young writers. Therefore, the revolt against the senior generation first and foremost should be on aesthetic grounds.

Yesayian asserts that there is a "strict revaluation"<sup>731</sup> by the new generation with regard to the cultural values of their predecessors. She finds these efforts "natural, spontaneous and

<sup>724</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Mshdnchenagan Esgesnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit. and *Vaghvan Hountské*, loc. cit.

<sup>725</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Vaghvan Hountské*, loc. cit.

<sup>726</sup> See *Pghosgré Ashdaragneré*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 227.

<sup>727</sup> See *Houné Kdnelou Hamar*, editorial, loc. cit., p. 194.

<sup>728</sup> See (Hagop) Sirouni, *Inch Grna Dal Kaghouté*, loc. cit.

<sup>729</sup> See Nshan Desdegyul, *Diroché Aykiyin Mech*, Part I, loc. cit. p. 35.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Mshdnchenagan Esgesnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit.



without any planned objective",<sup>732</sup> because in a transitional period every literary generation before launching their own career "frees itself from all the constraints of the past".<sup>733</sup>

### *Confidence*

Yesayian contentedly states that the literary "feature",<sup>734</sup> of the new generation is gradually taking its shape, and is assured that "it will find its identity",<sup>735</sup> which will be the reflection of its era "with unique ideas, worldview, spiritual disposition and mindset".<sup>736</sup> A generation with these credentials, she continues, of course does not want to be led by seniors, because their direction is based on a unique experience that differs from the previous one.

In another article, again Yesayian firmly reaffirmed the emergence of the new generation, which with "very modest and very cautious paces"<sup>737</sup> is heading in a new direction and has all the credibility "to be the authentic representative of our time",<sup>738</sup> which was characterised by turmoil and revival. What is an "authentic representative"? The embodiment of something uniquely Armenian, that is, something "ethnic"? Or the exponent of the complexity of diasporan urban life in general? Yet again, the reader is left in front of the riddle to solve it. This kind of unarticulated concept was commonplace in this discourse. Given the context of the debate, I will put forward my explanation. What she terms "authenticity" may consists in exposing the social, emotional and cultural features of the time. Young writers are in the best position to expose these features, because their individuality was formed under these circumstances.

Yesayian advises the writers of her generation to come to the terms with the fact that their role is diminishing in Armenian diasporan life, and that there is a new breed who after all its misfortunes is still "healthy",<sup>739</sup> "vibrant",<sup>740</sup> and ready "with its youthful enthusiasm and self assertiveness"<sup>741</sup> to take the fate of the people in its own hands. She assures her senior colleagues that the young writers do not need their support, because they are forging ahead.

<sup>732</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Vaghvan Hountské*, loc. cit.

<sup>733</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Mshdnchenagan Esgsnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit.

<sup>734</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Vaghvan Hountské*, loc. cit.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid.

<sup>737</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Mshdnchenagan Esgsnagner Yev Iragan Nor Serounté*, loc. cit.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid.

<sup>739</sup> See Zabel Yesayian, *Kragan Paghtsankner*, loc. cit.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

She also invites them “to join”<sup>742</sup> and “to accompany”<sup>743</sup> the new generation on their journey along the “new path which they opened by their own efforts”.<sup>744</sup> This new direction of the new writers was leading to their “own truth and towards a shiny future”.<sup>745</sup>

Evidently, Yesayan acknowledges that the arrival of the new generation in Armenian literature marked a new era. They were the result of the post-Genocide political matrix. They had a better understanding of the dynamics of the new situation, so they were the ones who would set the literary agenda and lead intellectual life. Against this backdrop, she was reconciled with the idea of being in the margins of diasporan literary life. The old generation would be in the role of companion rather than leader. The newcomers of diasporan literature were the ones who would set the pace of the journey, and not the other way round. The role of the old generation in that journey was to diminish hesitation. Apparently, she had a complete change of heart when she expressed great confidence in the ability of the new generation, which was about to take up the reins of Armenian literature in diaspora when previously she criticised the young writers for their dispirited state.<sup>746</sup>

## The onslaught

### *The context*

Two crucial dynamics shaped the identity of the new generation. Firstly, the impact of the Genocide was enormous. Almost every one of them had a personal tragedy to grieve. They were engulfed by a burning sense of great injustice. Shoushanian expresses the mood of his fellow writers of the same generation when he states that his generation grew up in “mud and suffering”<sup>747</sup> and that in “each nerve there is a hidden pain which aches”.<sup>748</sup> On another occasion he refers to the years of their teens as “malignant and miserable”<sup>749</sup> years, during

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> See Zabel Yesayan, *Kragan Oughin*, loc. cit.

<sup>747</sup> See *Mer Norakouyn Kraganoutian Masin* [On our Contemporary Literature], Vazken K. Shoushanian, *Harach*, no. 55, 6<sup>th</sup> December, Paris, 1925.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> See *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyuner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin* [Free Reflections on the Literature of Tomorrow], Vazken Shoushanian, Part I, *Harach*, no. 730, 21<sup>st</sup> August, Paris, 1928.

which they grew up with the “immeasurable tragedy of the Great Massacre”.<sup>750</sup> He concludes that his generation is already tired of this excessive emotional ordeal.

As we see, in the new generation a self-image formed around the idea of victimhood, which became one of the main components of their identity. This sense of victimhood became generic. For a long time the new generation considered itself as “adult orphans”. In Paris they even had an organisation called *Chapahas Vorperou Myutyun* [Association of Adult Orphans] (acronym CH.O.M.), which published its monthly literary periodical *Yergounk* [Pang] (1929-1937, Paris).

Secondly, after the turbulent years of World War I the dejection, coupled with the demise of moral and cultural values in the West is well documented. Talking about those values of the time, Shoushanian avers that after the Great War, all the previously cherished values underwent a fundamental revaluation, and this distorted the face of humanity. In order to evaluate the “beauty”,<sup>751</sup> he continues, the intellectual and moral faculties of the human being should be “immaculate”.<sup>752</sup> However, he says, “we the survivors”,<sup>753</sup> after all the bitter experience are not free from the distortion; and indicating the moral decadence and lack of inspiration of his generation he concludes “our souls [...] are without flight”.<sup>754</sup>

Here, it would be interesting to ask how the revaluation of the old values distorted the face of humanity, something that Shoushanian does not articulate. What were the criteria? It is well known that after great turbulent events the commonly used and accepted criteria cease to be the yardstick by which moral and artistic values are judged.

In the domain of art, this discontent was translated into rebellion against decadent institutional values in the shape of Modernism, which always implicated the European origin of the attendant aesthetics. It is worth noting that during the emergence of the Armenian literature in dispersion, especially in Europe, Modernism was in full swing; therefore, Shoushanian’s testimony was the echo of the motives of the European Modernist movement. Shoushanian does not articulate this process for a reason that I will discuss below.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid. In Shoushanian’s discourse the phrase “Great Massacre” had double usage. By writing in capital letters he indicated the Armenian Genocide, and by small letters he indicated the carnage of the World War I.

<sup>751</sup> See Vazken K. Shoushanian, *Mer Norakouyn Kraganoutian Masin*, loc. cit.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

*The revolt**Disregarded by elders*

Vazken Shoushanian initiated the harsh criticism against the old generation of writers in 1925. It was a response to the chorus of criticism that was launched by some critics in the literary printed press. Of these, Zabel Yesayan and Nshan Desdegyul were the primary targets of Shoushanian's attack. The former was mentioned by name, and the latter was referred to as the "home-destroyer guardian"<sup>755</sup> of the lord's vineyard (the allusion was to the article written by Desdegyul entitled "In the Vineyard of the Lord").

Shoushanian states that the new generation of writers are disregarded by the old generation, and the only time that they talk about his generation is when there is a chance to undermine them. They always found an excuse to deplore the present lamentable state of Armenian literature, and nostalgically evoked the heyday of their past. At this point, it is worth mentioning that Shoushanian's criticism was inaccurate. On the contrary, Desdegyul and Yesayan admonished the young writers to disassociate themselves from the past in order to find their own way. On top of all this, he continues, they were giving unnecessary advice to his generation. He derides Desdegyul for suffering from myopia, because he cannot see the talented writers of the new generation. Even renowned prose writer Hamasdegh, who was Desdegyul's countryman,<sup>756</sup> had escaped his attention. In his critical evaluation of the works of new writers, continues Shoushanian, Desdegyul was employing principles that he had "learnt by heart"<sup>757</sup> from foreign literatures, and now without ruminating on those principles he was employing them in his criticism.

Hamasdegh's literature, as previously discussed (see Chapter Three), was dedicated to his village and the people of villages in provincial Armenia. Before publishing his first collection of short stories in 1923, he had begun to publish them from 1921<sup>758</sup> in both *Hayrenik* newspaper and its literary monthly supplement. When Desdegyul wrote his article *Mer Kraganoutyuné (Ourvakdzer)* [Our Literature (Outlines)] in *Navasart* (New York) in 1922, in

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Both writers were based in the USA.

<sup>757</sup> See Vazken K. Shoushanian, *Mer Norakouyn Kraganoutian Masin*, loc. cit.

<sup>758</sup> According to Minas Teoleolian his first stories were published in *Hayrenik* newspaper. See *Tar Mé Kraganoutyun 1850-1950*, vol. 2, p.113, 1956.

which he advocated the re-creation of Armenia through literature, Hamasdegh was already a household name in the domain of rural literature. By the time of Desdegyul's second article *Diroché Aykiyin Mech* [In the Vineyard of the Lord] published in the monthly *Hayrenik* in 1925, Hamasdegh was a renowned writer. In neither article does he mention the work or even the name of Hamasdegh. In this sense Shoushanian's criticism was apposite: Desdegyul showed disregard towards Hamasdegh, especially even though they both had close links through the circles of *Hayrenik* (which had close affiliation with the ARF). Desdegyul's second article was quite patronising and it had a denialist attitude toward the serious efforts of the new writers in the domain of literature. As for the young writers' complaint about the extent of the disregard shown to them, this was inaccurate, as I mentioned above.

Shoushanian asserts that his generation also have the knowledge of contemporary literature. They also equally read the same writers that Yesayan did, such as Romain Rolland<sup>759</sup> and Henri Barbusse,<sup>760</sup> but unlike her, he claims, they ruminated on those literary works. There was a tone of youthful pretentiousness in Shoushanian's attitude, an effort to be regarded as having an equal sophistication and knowledge of international contemporary literary issues.

Shoushanian rightly questions the wisdom of their predecessors in having such high expectations from the new generation at this early stage of their literary career. He approximately gives the year 1919 as the departure point of the literary activities of the new generation, and in Paris in 1925 poses a rhetorical question, asking which literature in the world has had a generation of writers reaching creative maturity in six years. He expresses his surprise for the hasty course of development that the new generation was driven on to, and advises his predecessors to give them the chance and the space to grow up, or as he puts it, first let the fruits grow and then judge their taste. He puts forward four names of writers from his generation, namely Hamasdegh (prose writer), Shavarsh Nartouni (prose writer), Yeghishé Charents (Soviet-Armenian poet) and Levon-Zaven Surmelian (poet), and suggests to the senior generation to put their hopes in them.

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<sup>759</sup> Romain Rolland, (1866-1944) French novelist his most acclaimed work is a series of ten novels called "Jean-Christophe" (1904-1912), which was an archetype of the *roman fleuve*. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1915. Through his literature he promoted harmonious co-existence between the nations.

<sup>760</sup> Henri Barbusse (1873-1935) French writer, best known for his work *Le Feu* (1916) [The Fire], a personal account of life in the trenches of World War I, for which he was awarded the *Prix Concourt*. In his literary works he promoted peace.

### *Denialism*

Shoushanian admits that because of the mayhem of the war in his generation there is a strong urge for negation, rejection, denial and dissatisfaction. He acknowledges that in the post-War period, the criteria for evaluation have become more rigorous. This was a general attitude among the new writers towards the values of the past.

In a series of interviews with new writers conducted by Shoushanian, which was published in *Navasart*, they expressed their controversial views on the literary production of the previous generation. Shavarsh Nartouni (see Appendix) in talking about his preferences in Armenian literature expresses his dislike towards Arshag Chobanian's literature by claiming that he is not an artist. He totally rejects the literary production of Siamanto and the Soviet-Armenian poet Yeghishé Charents, branding the latter as a "poor clown".<sup>761</sup>

Ohan Garo<sup>762</sup> rejects the idea of "pre-defined rules" in literature, which would fetter the creative inspiration of the writers. In this context he expresses his discontent of the cultivation of "an ethnic or characteristically Armenian literature".<sup>763</sup> He admires no Armenian writer from the previous generation because none had any impact on him in terms of enhancing his aesthetic views. A similar view was expressed by Shoushanian, as he stated that intellectually his generation did not inherit anything from their predecessors, because they did not leave anything.<sup>764</sup>

Rafayel Zartarian (see Appendix) disassociates himself from literary schools and directions, because in the fast-changing world values were also changing. Therefore, any effort to follow certain principles would limit the creative scope of the writers. As for his preferences he states that he cannot tolerate two writers Taniel Varouzhan and Oshagan, finding the literary works of the latter "fake, artificial, inauthentic and cold".<sup>765</sup>

Rafayel Zartarian's denialism has the elements of youthful pretentiousness, a lack of deep understanding of Western Armenian literature and a lack of objective critical judgement. First, he does not articulate what constitutes being "fake", "artificial" and "inauthentic".

<sup>761</sup> See *Mer Noreroun Mod* (Shavarsh Nartouni) [With our New Writers], Vazken K. Shoushanian (interviewer), *Navasart*, no. 5, September-October, p. 145, Bucharest, 1925.

<sup>762</sup> Ohan Garo (1890-1933) was born in Van in Armenia (nowadays Turkey). Immigrated to Paris in 1923.

<sup>763</sup> See *Mer Noreroun Mod* (Ohan Garo), Vazken K. Shoushanian (interviewer), *Navasart*, no. 7, January, p. 205, Bucharest, 1926.

<sup>764</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyuner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>765</sup> See *Mer Noreroun Mod* (Rafayel Zartarian), Vazken Shoushanian (interviewer) *Navasart*, no. 8, February, p. 237, Bucharest, 1926.

Against which touchstone does he break the reputation of these writers? It is important to keep in mind that we are dealing with two eminent Armenian writers, especially in the case of Varouzhan, whose contribution to the development of Western Armenian poetry was enormous. Zartarian does not spell out the reason/s for his dislike.

Being an admirer of Oriental literatures, he likes Eastern Armenian literature more than Western Armenian literature, because the former is the reflection “of the Armenian soul and therefore of the Orient”.<sup>766</sup> Are we dealing here with the same concept of “Armenian soul” as it was put forward by *Mehian* a decade before? Except for being Oriental what were its other components? These are some of the questions that remain unanswered. As for Eastern Armenian literature being the reflection of “Armenian soul” and the “Orient”, I need to repeat that in Armenian critical discourses, unlike Europeanised “urban” Western Armenian literature, Eastern Armenian literature was seen as more “rurally” orientated. Therefore, it was the reflection of Armenianness. He goes as far as to claim that some writers need to be silenced (he does not specify any means for silencing them), such as Zabel Yesayan and some old writers who have a hostile attitude towards his generation. He concludes that “they do not understand and cannot love us”.<sup>767</sup> The feeling of being misunderstood and unloved haunted the young writers. The former was a commonly heard complaint uttered during every generational change. The latter was the pathological feeling of being neglected. We should not forget that we are dealing with a generation of orphans.

Hrach Zartarian also refuses to follow any literary movement, mentioning two in particular: “art for art’s sake” and any kind of literature that engaged in the efforts of pursuing certain objectives. According to him the former was ineffective and the latter was “vulgar propaganda”.<sup>768</sup> Instead, he fails to propose anything.

Zartarian’s criticism was indirectly targeting the old generation. In one way or another, they were involved in both movements. The first one – “art for art’s sake” – was the aesthetic trend of the pre-Genocide generation. By rejecting literature that has certain commitments, he brushes aside the whole idea of “ethnic” literature, because intentionally created literature that seeks certain objectives will be the violation of literary principles. It was also a way of rejecting the patronage of the old generation.

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<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> See *Mer Noreroun Mod (Hrach Zartarian)*, Vazken Shoushanian (interviewer), *Navasart*, no. 9, March, p. 264, Bucharest, 1926.

With regard to his predecessors, he takes a more tolerant line than his younger brother, Rafayel Zartarian. He expresses his admiration for Tlgadintsi, Roupen Zartarian (his father), Taniel Varouzhan and Krikor Zohrab. He claims that some of the literary works of Zohrab could proudly be compared with those Maupassant. Surprisingly, a couple of paragraphs later he contradicts himself by saying that he could not get used to the poetry of Varouzhan and Siamanto.<sup>769</sup>

Vazken Shoushanian discharged his wrath on the predecessors of his generation. He launches a diatribe against Oshagan, branding him an "incompetent and rude villager",<sup>770</sup> and his fellow villagers as "[...] bandits, prostitutes and savages".<sup>771</sup> Despite respecting the literary work of Zabel Yesayan, he says "with disgust let's spit at her as a writer of social commentaries and as a social activist".<sup>772</sup> Arshag Chobanian's fate was no better than that of Oshagan, whom Shoushanian brands "the deaf and dwarf beadle of a destroyed church".<sup>773</sup> Despite his extreme dislike of some writers, Shoushanian pays tribute to other writers of the old generation, such as Siamanto, Avedis Aharonian, Vahan Tekeyian and Levon Shant.

Shoushanian's unconventional use of language grabs one's attention. It is indicative of the severity of his animosity and bitterness towards some of the old writers. He was of a passionate and a rebellious disposition. The animosity against Oshagan stems from his dismissive attitude towards the innovative efforts of the new writers. Here, worth remembering is Oshagan's deep admiration of Hamasdegh's provincial literature, with whom he shared common ground in terms of recreating the rural life of Armenia. Shoushanian's other two victims, namely Zabel Yesayan and Arshag Chobanian, were political foes of the ARF, of which he was a member. The former had close affiliations with the pro-Soviet Armenia camp, and the latter was a member of LDP, while the writers with whom he sympathises were all his party members except Tekeyian (a member of the LDP party). Therefore, political affiliations played some role as well in the literary evaluation of the old generation. Another important point is that almost all the above-mentioned young writers in one way or another were against the literary schools and any form of imposition of literary principles. This stance made the advocates of ethnocentric literature powerless, and the debate surrounding this issue from the mid-1920s began to lose its significance.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>770</sup> See *Kedin Ingadz Hasger* (Houshadedres) [Ears of Grain Fallen to the Ground (From my Diaries)], Vazken Shoushanian, *Navasart*, no. 11, May, p. 309, Bucharest, 1926.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid. p. 311.



Denialism was generic in the critical evaluations of this generation. It was a natural reaction to the efforts by the old generation to impose certain values. What is more, their sufferings obliterated any sense of respect towards those values. The lack of credible and reputable old writers and critics emboldened this generation. And finally, they wanted to devise their own system of values; one cannot do that without demolishing the previous system. As Shoushanian puts it: “in our garden, we water and cultivate the flowers which suit our climate.”<sup>774</sup>

### *The comparative evaluation*

Shoushanian strongly affirms that the literary production of the new writers has more to offer as a literary achievement than all the new writers of the past, who were involved in creative activities during the period stretching from the creation of the contemporary phase of Armenian literature (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) to the eve of Genocide in 1915. He uses the example of the poet Kamar-Katiba (see Appendix), and suggests comparing his patriotic poems with any contemporary young poets with modest ability. He insists the result will be striking, showing that our predecessors “were satisfied with the beauties, which today would seem ugly.”<sup>775</sup> Besides Kamar-Katiba’s name (though within brackets and in a repudiating manner), he mentions the names of Mgrdich Beshigtashlian and Nahabed Rousinian (see Appendix), adding that he does not want to compare these plagiarists to any Armenian writer. In the case of the former, two of his poems were the emulation of European poems. The first is *Taghoumn Kachortvouyn* [The Burial of the Brave], which was the emulation of the English poet Charles Wolfe’s (1791-1828) “The Burial of Sir John Moore”, and the second, *Hay Kachortin* [The Armenian Brave], was the emulation of one of the poems of Victor Hugo, namely *L’Enfant* from his work *Les Orientales*. Beshigtashlian’s poems were part of a series inspired by the events of Zeytoun.<sup>776</sup> Nahabed Rousinian is one of the rare examples

<sup>774</sup> See Vazken K. Shoushanian, *Mer Norakouyn Kraganoutian Masin*, loc. cit.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> Zeytoun was a Cilician town with a long-standing reputation for a rebellious past. Under Ottoman rule it had enjoyed a semi-autonomous status. Zeytoun had frequently been the scene of clashes between the Turkish regular army and Armenian fighters. One of those riots was in 1862 when outnumbered Armenians defeated the Turkish army, but they remained under siege; only French intervention was able to ease the situation. This struggle was seen as an act of heroism by the majority of Armenians. It left an indelible mark on the Armenian “national” consciousness, and was a huge moral boost for an enslaved people. This event became the source of inspiration and national pride for many poets and writers.

of Armenian literature, because he gained citizenship by a single patriotic poem entitled *Giligia* [Cilicia], an emulation of the French poem *Ma Normandie* by Frédéric Bérat (1801-1855). These hybrid poems in the Armenian literary criticism are traditionally viewed as emulation rather than plagiarism.

It is true that their predecessors' literary production, like Kamar-Katiba's poems, may not satisfy contemporary literary tastes and could collapse under critical scrutiny. Shoushanian did not consider that Armenian poetry in the 1860s was in the first phase of the modern period, and poets like Kamar-Katiba and Mgrdich Beshigtashlian were its first pioneers. Their literary production may not stand up to the contemporary criticism, but they laid the foundation upon which the edifice of Armenian poetry was built. Moreover, if we read between the lines, Shoushanian's accusing Beshigtashlian and Rousinian of plagiarism brings to the surface the real motivation for his criticism. By undermining the non-Armenian sources of their poetry, it seems that his intention is to diminish their Armenian credibility. This was designed to amplify the significance of the source of poetry of his generation, which was nourished from bitter experience of the "national" tragedy, namely the Genocide. This would turn them into the legitimate inheritors of the long Armenian literary traditions. Here, it is important to note that Shoushanian does not include in his comparisons the high priests of Armenian poetry, such as Varouzhan, Siamanto and Medzarents. The poets of his generation were under the spell of these Constantinople poets.

Shoushanian continues with his comparative method of evaluation. He compares the pre-Genocide generation with the new writers. Thus, Ardashes Haroutyunian compares with Levon-Zaven Syurmelian; Nar-Tos compares with Hrach Zartarian; Yeroukhan compares with Yeghishé Ayvazian; and Ren compares with Onnig Chifté-Saraf. The evaluation of those writers is out of the scope of this thesis, especially as Shoushanian's verdicts are more like personal judgements based on preferences, and he did not elucidate his views at length.

Talking about plagiarism Sarafian also pinpoints a flaw in Armenian literature, which is the practice of borrowing or even plagiarising foreign thoughts, and trying to adapt them to Armenian literature. This artful trick, he continues, would be considered a clever thing to do and would secure for the individuals in question an eminent status in intellectual circles. He cites two reasons for this trend: the unfavourable political situation in Constantinople, the Caucasus and mainland Armenia hampered normal intellectual development; and the Armenians' racial inaptitude to develop philosophical thinking. Sarafian suddenly throws in this unconventional idea of racial inaptitude. How did it come about? What were its concrete

manifestations? He does not answer. I suppose for him, apart from politics, there were other cultural dynamics that prevented the normal cultural development of Western Armenians in the pre-Genocide period. However, it was true that the philosophical foundations of Armenian literature – except in very few cases – were shaky. Armenian literature had tackled the issues with national and social significance, and the nature of that material was emotional and sentimental; philosophical plunges were unfamiliar to Armenian writers.

### **The way forward 1928**

#### *Armenian literature at a crossroads*

The realisation that they were spatially and temporally at an important crossroads prompted some young writers to adjust themselves to the new situation and to find answers to the burning issues of literature and identity. Of these, Vazken Shoushanian and Nigoghos Sarafian were among the few who raised the questions of the intellectual challenges that the new generation faced in the fast-paced, foreign environments. Whether in Paris, Boston or Cairo, the Armenian writers had to face the dilemma between preserving the Armenian cultural identity and embracing what had been unexpectedly handed to them in terms of the artistic and intellectual opportunities of the new world, especially Paris. In this sense both these writers made a significant input to the debates concerning the future direction of Armenian diasporan literature, and the importance of the consolidation and promulgation of innovative ideas.

Shoushanian realises that life has been greatly changed and that time is advancing rapidly; he exhorts his fellow writers by saying “let’s move fast”,<sup>777</sup> because with the changing world they need to keep pace. The significant thing in the continuation of this idea is that he enjoins the fellow writers to observe the changing world and look upon it “from [...] a height”,<sup>778</sup> because, he continues, “we are standing at the turning point on a road”<sup>779</sup> that their fate will determine, and it is a huge responsibility to take the right direction.

<sup>777</sup> See *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Vazken Shoushanian, Part III, *Harach*, no. 733, 24<sup>th</sup> August, Paris, 1928.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

Evidently, Shoushanian was trying to emphasise the importance of observing and evaluating the fast-moving world. To be part of the ongoing processes in the world meant that Armenian intellectuals had to change their perspectives. This must be done from a certain distance in order to capture the changing social and intellectual landscape. The role of thorough observation was crucial which would allow them to make the corresponding intellectual adjustments. The realisation of the importance of keeping pace with the changes of the time was indicative of a degree of maturity. A new generation existed that was adamant to be the echo of their era, which meant that in exile they had to expose the result of the interaction between Armenian identity and the other cultures. In the constantly mutating world, Armenian writers accordingly had to reposition themselves for the best vista in order to capture the view of the cultural landscape. This would enhance their knowledge of their host countries' cultural systems. Therefore, it would provide the opportunity for enriching Armenian culture, especially literature, with the best elements of other cultures.

### ***The Modern under attack***

Before engaging with Shoushanian's views on this matter, it is important to address the terminological concern regarding the terms "Modernity" and "Modernism". Shoushanian uses the Armenian term *artiaganoutyun* [modernity]. The Armenian word *arti* means "new", "contemporary" and "modern". For example in the phrase *arti zhamanagner* [modern times] *arti* could mean "modern", "new" and "contemporary". In the phrase *arti kraganoutyun* it means "modern literature", while *zhamanagagits kraganoutyun* denotes "contemporary literature". If we add the adjectival suffix *agan* at the end of the word *arti* it becomes *artiagan* which means "modern". If we add the suffix *outyun* on *artiagan* and make it noun as *artiaganoutyun* it will mean "modernity". The word Modernism in Armenian is *artiabashdoutyun*. In his series of articles called *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin* [Free Reflections on the Literature of Tomorrow] (four parts) dedicated to this subject, Shoushanian uses these two terms *artiagan* "modern" and *artiaganoutyun* "modernity" (in quotation marks).

The controversial terms "modern" and "modernity" are subject to various definitions and disputes. They are loaded with cumbersome theoretical interpretations, which make the understanding of these terms an enormously complex task. I will avoid discussing the complex theoretical issues on this matter, since it is out of the scope of this thesis. In the case

of Shoushanian the term “modernity” is a very vague concept. He does not define the term at all. Sometimes “modernity” overlaps with the European Modernist movement in art and literature. For example, when he discusses aesthetics he uses “modernity”. In a negative context, for another example, he mentions the “Modernists” of Saint Michelle,<sup>780</sup> [*Sen Misheli ‘Artiaganner’*]. The term *artiaganner* literally means “moderns”, which would not make sense, unless we use it in the given sense.

The target of Shoushanian’s scathing attack is “Modern” with all its manifestation in all aspects of life, except technology. “Modern” culture and art with all its players are his target. The political elite with their cunning stratagems usurped power from the people. Even the “Modern” ways of living and dressing were criticised. This was due to political, social and cultural reasons (see below).

Modernism, following the European examples, was the dominant language in art when the young Armenian writers, especially the Parisian wing, launched their literary career in the first half of the 1920s. Paris became the playground of innovative artists and artistic movements. The Armenian writers either in Paris or other Western cities did not engage in most of these innovative literary ideas. That is not to say that they were uninformed of the ongoing artistic developments of their time. The Armenian printed press every now and then published articles covering different aspects of European Modernist art and artists. These articles had more informative objectives, and did not engage in deep analysis, which could spark intellectual debate on these issues. Similarly, the Armenian writers in diaspora never embraced the aesthetic and ideological principles that would have led them far beyond the shade of the traditional literary tree. In this context Shoushanian is one of the rare writers, who grapples with this phenomenon, and expresses his rejectionist attitude on this issue.

He expresses his aversion towards Modern. He launches a scathing attack against those<sup>781</sup> who, instead of embracing the looming “victorious”,<sup>782</sup> future choose to be spectators “of an animalistic farce, which with a bold and insolent vulgarity we call “modernity””.<sup>783</sup> He brands the advocates of this “new art”,<sup>784</sup> as “so-called liberals”,<sup>785</sup> and “little

<sup>780</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>781</sup> Shouashanian does not specify the addressee of his attack, but apparently it was directed against intellectuals and writers of all nationalities and convictions.

<sup>782</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

bourgeois''.<sup>786</sup> This was typical of the rhetoric of Shoushanian, which the literary circles were by then familiar with. He continues his onslaught on the Modern by giving another definition. To the question "what is modernity?" he answers "blind, covetous and stupid worship of this evil present time".<sup>787</sup> He links this kind of culture to the bourgeois class. It is an art movement which lacks "ideology, faith, enthusiasm [and] strength".<sup>788</sup> Shoushanian poses a question whether from this kind of "rascal"<sup>789</sup> environment; "really free, really beautiful, [and] really great literature"<sup>790</sup> can be produced. His swift answer is no, because the values of Modern life are destroying beauty and freedom. Modernism, to him, is an artistic vandalism that ignores human suffering and dignity.

When he talks of Modern, Shoushanian does not develop a body of argument based on an intellectual foundation, which would validate his stance. His onslaught is the visceral articulation of a disillusioned person. His rhetoric gives a clear idea of his irresistible disgust towards the Modern, which for him is a "swamp",<sup>791</sup> "half fainted prolongation of the past"<sup>792</sup> and "degenerated".<sup>793</sup> In addition to this, he uses more than a dozen uses of "prostitute", "prostitution" and "whorish" to label different aspects of it.

He declares war against not only Modernist aesthetics but also the Modern way of living. There are abundant references to the symbols of the Modern way of life such as "Charleston",<sup>794</sup> "music hall",<sup>795</sup> "jazz band",<sup>796</sup> "dancing",<sup>797</sup> and "bar".<sup>798</sup> The French Riviera was the hub of activities which he considered "fornicating and miserable".<sup>799</sup>

According to Shoushanian, writers have two directions to follow. The first is the detrimental route, which leads to decadent Modern, the second leads to a bright future. Therefore, he exhorts writers to look to the future, because the past is deprived of "breathing, youth and beauty".<sup>800</sup> There are struggles to be fought for the destruction of the Modern with

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<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid. A kind of dance which found popularity in the 1920s.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> See *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Vazken Shoushanian, Part II, *Harach*, no. 732, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, Paris, 1928.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid.

help of the people, “who are slaves, deprived of freedom”.<sup>801</sup> Here it is worth mentioning that in Shoushanian’s rhetoric, the past was the Modern and the future was Socialism, which will be discussed below.

It needs to be noted that Shoushanian’s harsh criticism of the Modern stems from Western policy with regard to Armenians. His main disillusionment was on the silence of the Modern and civilised societies in the face of the Armenians’ tragic experience. He is sure that the writers and critics of these societies would not care even if “the Turkish hordes again massacre thousands of Armenian orphans”.<sup>802</sup> In fact, many Western intellectuals and prominent individuals voiced their concerns about the persecutions against Armenians before the Genocide. Of course, the European political elite did not translate this into palpable action.

The real source of Shoushanian’s aversion towards the Modern had roots that were more social and political. The core of Modernist aesthetics was individualism and activity that is more introspective. The Modernist artists were more prone to abandon public life; the bohemian lifestyle was in vogue. It was an elitist culture, and for that reason, a large part of the population would be excluded from interaction with the arts, which was a basic human right. The above-mentioned characteristics of Modernism were against all that Shoushanian stood for. In the wake of World War I, the writers socially and artistically had to engage with humanity, trying to alleviate their suffering. The Armenian suffering was a part of human suffering, and he locates the “national” tragedy in the human tragedy of the Great War. Therefore, for all the reasons cited above, as far as Shoushanian was concerned Modernism was not the aesthetic remedy for the souls of suffering Armenians. Modernism was a symbol of Western hypocrisy and negligence of the suffering of other small nations, including the Armenians. In this context he lambastes those who follow this movement, especially in the wake of the “Great Massacre”.<sup>803</sup> Moreover, Shoushanian was an angry man, his rage was an explosive mixture of his Socialist convictions and disillusionment regarding the war; added to these he was haunted by the bitter experience of the Genocide, during which he lost his family.

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

<sup>803</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyuner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, II and III, loc. cit.

### *Socialism*

Shoushanian's next targets for severe criticism are the bourgeoisie and capitalism, for which Modernism serves as an aesthetic framework. According to him there was collusion between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, who subscribed to bourgeois-capitalist ideas, under the camouflage of the Modern; he calls them "prostitute intellectuals".<sup>804</sup> He cites many examples such as the media, whose editors "poison the minds of working and suffering people".<sup>805</sup> Second in the line of fire are some university lecturers, writers, religious personalities and other officials, who as "mercenaries"<sup>806</sup> also serve their "lords".<sup>807</sup> He blames the whole system for suppressing the working class. "Without the complicity of intellectuals",<sup>808</sup> continues Shoushanian, this system would not survive – it would collapse. He accuses them of failing in their moral duties by not responding to the suffering and injustice that prevail in the world. Therefore, he concludes, it is in vain to expect the demise of this system, since the writers themselves were shoring it up. This was the reason, according to him, why life was going forward and literature backward.

He heralds the arrival of a new "civilisation"<sup>809</sup> [*kaghakagrtoutyun*], which originated from "the working and suffering people".<sup>810</sup> It will establish its complete "realm",<sup>811</sup> crushing the old order. However, the main obstacle was the Modern with its anti-revolutionary nature. It derides all efforts that intend to introduce changes for the betterment of human kind. Until now, he continues, the individuals led the ordinary people, and now the role is reversed, as in the future the ordinary people will lead society. In this context he is sure that the "civilisation of tomorrow is collective, widespread and socialist. The literature of tomorrow also will be collective, widespread and socialist".<sup>812</sup>

As we see, literature had a special social function for Shoushanian. It had to project the social life of the people, who bear not only the whole burden of the consequences of the elite's irresponsibility, but also become the object of their exploitation. In this sense literature

<sup>804</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyuner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part II, loc. cit.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> See *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyuner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Vazken Shoushanian, Part IV, *Harach*, no 734, 25<sup>th</sup> August, Paris, 1928.



had to become a tool of resistance, and in the meantime a therapy for human suffering; it had to elevate their spirituality. Therefore, in order to employ literature for the designated objective it had to be reclaimed from the elite. The popularisation of literature will pave the way towards the Socialism of literature. It should be mentioned here that the social function of literature was not an unfamiliar concept in Armenian literature: as discussed previously in the case of 19<sup>th</sup> century Armenian Realist literature, it was a useful way of exposing social evils. It is also to be noted that the relation between the ordinary people and the writer was viewed from a very different political ideological perspective. Socialism is the framework within which the future artistic collaboration between writers and the masses will take place, a vehicle for the writers to reach out to dejected humanity. Socialism had an important place in Shoushanian's life. He was ardently committed to the Socialist ideology. He was a staunch supporter and member of the ARF, which had a Socialist orientation. However, Socialism was not top of the ARF's agenda. On top of that, the establishment of the Soviet Union gave Socialism a new impetus in France in the 1920s, a handful of Armenian writers being influenced by leftist movements. Being a Socialist, he passionately believed in human justice in society. As an Armenian, he was a victim of great injustice; this increased his dedication and consolidated his resolve in the struggle for human justice. Socialism was also a kind of window to the outside world, which brought him out of the nationalist framework. It turned him into a dedicated and zealous champion of human causes; in short, unlike other nationalist writers he became "*internationalist*". This attitude was indicative of a degree of openness in the young writers; they were susceptible to the circulating ideological and intellectual currents, trying to accommodate them to the Armenian situation.

### **Self-criticism**

#### ***The superficiality of Armenian intellectuals***

Armenian intellectuals are divorced from the intellectual developments of their environments, complains Shoushanian: they do not read. They engage in trivial communal and personal activities, and do not see the whole picture. In other words, they are not part of society at large; they talk more than they observe. Another major flaw, according to him, is the fact that their intellectual faculties were not developing. He warns that "without

gathering provisions for tomorrow”,<sup>813</sup> Armenian writers will become “intellectually “barefoot””.<sup>814</sup>

He puts forward his propositions in order to avoid impending intellectual catastrophe. Firstly, the writers have to learn and broaden their knowledge about life. Secondly, the writers have to get rid of “the fetters of prejudice and inner blindness”<sup>815</sup> of their past. The mode of evaluation of their fathers, namely “judging blindly, from the parochial and narrow nationalistic point of view”,<sup>816</sup> is not applicable in the new world.

The issues that Shoushanian raises need to be examined. The intellectual nourishment of the writers has to come from the experience of observing and interacting with life, and not from other sources. Their observation on life will also provide them with the essential tools to grapple with social phenomena, in terms of interpreting individual and collective behaviours. This will help to build the social framework of their literary works. They have also to dust themselves down from the parochialism of the past – in the new world the criteria of evaluation must be enhanced. The superficiality of the past has to be superseded by deep analysis, which will provide insights into the dynamics of society.

Here we may wonder why Shoushanian disapproved of the involvement of writers in Modernism, while he was also admonishing his fellow writers to be involved in contemporary life. Shoushanian is missing an important point that literary movements are points of view, ways of looking at life and making sense of it. They were dealing with reality from their own perspective, and this needed to be taken into account to enhance their knowledge.

### *Forgetting the past*

The Armenian past has been viewed as a continuation of tragedies, which was causing paralysing emotional pain and intellectual stagnation. Nigoghos Sarafian underlines the importance of closing the door on the painful past. According to him, the past should not feed the present with its bitterness because Armenians have a responsibility to survive. Therefore, he exhorts them to forget the “incinerated past”,<sup>817</sup> and not to turn back in order to face it

<sup>813</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part I, loc. cit.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid.

<sup>815</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part III, loc. cit.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> See Nigoghos Sarafian, *Mdadzoumer*, loc. cit.

“like the wife of Lot”.<sup>818</sup> He also urges them to stay at bay from “weeping romanticism”.<sup>819</sup> No matter what enormous loss they had in the past, Armenian writers have to face the future, with a great “discipline”<sup>820</sup> and “organisation”.<sup>821</sup> The Armenian writers have to forge ahead against their will, and they have to produce literary works even if they are facing thousands of obstacles.

The symbol of Lot’s wife was often employed by Sarafian to signify the calamitous consequences in the case of failing to disassociate themselves from the past. I mentioned previously (see Chapter Three), and I have to retell the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which serves as the framework to Sarafian’s argument. Lot was ordered by the messenger of God to flee from Sodom and Gomorrah because the wrath of God would fall upon the inhabitants for their immoral activities. They were strictly instructed on their way out not to look back; otherwise, a severe punishment would follow. Lot’s wife could not resist the temptation; a desire prompted from nostalgic memory of the old town drove her for the last time to look back at her burning hometown. Because of this unwise action, she was turned into a pillar of salt.<sup>822</sup>

The action of Lot’s wife was self-destructive because her inability to distance herself from the undesirable past (in this case the excessive immoral activities of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah) destroyed her. Likewise, in the post-Genocide Armenian context, dwelling upon the tragic past would be a self-destructive activity. Therefore, disassociation from it was vital for a new start; entanglement in the past could decelerate the pace towards remedy, and subsequently to revival. Besides surviving, Armenians had to keep the normal pace of development with other nations.

### *Pessimism*

Sarafian states that pessimism is paralysing the new generation of writers. The political defeat, which causes frustration and agony, as well as “disgust”<sup>823</sup> towards the older generation were the two main sources of this mood. The first point is self-explanatory. As for his unconventional stance towards the literary works of the previous generation, while

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid.

<sup>822</sup> Bible, Genesis, op. cit.

<sup>823</sup> See Nigoghos Sarafian, *Mdadzoumner*, loc. cit.

being part of the trend of the time, it was an effort by young writers to make a readjustment in the literary space of diaspora.

Sarafian exhorts intellectuals to dedicate themselves to intellectual endeavour. This pessimism, according to him, should be transformed into a constructive force. It should increase the desire in Armenian writers “for intellectual work”.<sup>824</sup> Especially in exile, where “the absence of tradition, the characteristically racial environment and the hereditarily cultivated blood”<sup>825</sup> will double the developmental efforts of Armenian writers. The kernel of Sarafian’s argument was that intellectual labour was designed to enhance their general as well as “ethnic” knowledge. Had they been in their natural “ethnic” habitat they would acquire the knowledge naturally from different sources of traditions. In Sarafian’s stance one can trace the echoes of the school of thought that promoted the idea that in a time of crisis of “national” significance, intellectual activities are the course of action to be taken. This had always saved Armenians from demise (see Chapter Three). This idea is also connected to another school of thought, according to which, like other nations, Armenians have a civilisational role to play. For that reason, they have to be at the forefront of intellectual activities (see Chapter Four).

Intellectual development, stresses Sarafian, is vital for Armenian writers, which will enable them to broaden the horizon of their art. He raises the important question of exposing them to the contemporary currents of thought and literary projects. This should be coupled with the experience of life. Therefore, he urges the writers first and foremost to be intimately engaged with life. The dreams and unhealthy deviations should be kept at bay, he continues; instead, the writers have to assess everyday life. Their success consists in the way in which they process the materials that they gather during their observations. If they write less and contemplate more, they will filter out the unnecessary elements of experiences and impressions. The successful writer is the one who “purifies [...] his emotions and visions”,<sup>826</sup> thus enhancing the texture of their literary production. The other important point which Sarafian makes is that literature should be “akin to reality”,<sup>827</sup> and the mission of the writer is to give the truth of life, which is hidden from naked eyes.

Sarafian’s advocacy of disassociation from the pessimistic attitude was a crucial effort to redirect the creative interests of the writers towards the present stage of life. However, unlike

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<sup>824</sup> Ibid.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid.

other critics such as Mkhitarian who urged Armenian writers to portray Armenian life past and present in the homeland and in exile, Sarafian does not demarcate the geography of the life that had to be portrayed. He encourages the writers to be attached to the reality which has no "ethnic" colour. This would also distract attention from the painful past, something which Sarafian was very keen to achieve.

### *Writers and readership connection*

The close interaction between the people and writers would have negative consequences for the latter. According to Sarafian, writers should live among the people and be spiritually linked to them, at the same time keeping an indispensable distance from them. This was designed to keep the writers at bay "from cheap glories, cheap and "benumbing praises",<sup>828</sup> of the people, which would have detrimental influences.

In order to make their literary works accessible to the common people the new generation is producing a spiritless literature. Sarafian calls attention to the fact that when it comes to literature, people are "infant",<sup>829</sup> especially Armenians. Their unsophisticated taste in literature compels Armenian writers to compromise the quality of their literary production. The writers, prompted by popular demand, were keen to produce a literature that was characterised by its ornate style. This was designed to dazzle the readers.

Sarafian's argument boils down to the simple fact that the absence of the intellectual framework in the literary production of the writers reduced their work to "fireworks" of words. There is always the danger of creative complacency stemming from generous evaluations of non-professional sources, which would stop the flow of artistic creativity.

He states that this aesthetic flaw, inherited from the previous generation, stems from two facts: a fondness for the traditional Oriental eye-catching colours, tardiness and repetition, and the mastery of the Armenian writers in emulating the Western mode of articulating easy concepts in a difficult way. He assures that his generation is adamant to change this trend. They will perceive the intricate concepts in a much easier way and will articulate them in a simpler way. However, they do not underestimate the aesthetic role of the style, but they rank the expression of soul above it. Here, it seems that Sarafian tries to accentuate the importance of the internal dynamics of literary works, assigning a subordinate role to the form. He also

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<sup>828</sup> Ibid.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid

states that they are in the quest of literature that outpaces science and uncovers new and mysterious spaces. This adventurous spirit would take Armenian literature to new uncharted territories.

In this context popular appreciation would limit the worldview of the writers by discouraging them to venture beyond the “ethnic” boundaries. Instead of taking their intellectual nourishment from their people, it will be an enriching experience if “they throw their gaze”<sup>830</sup> beyond the “national” boundaries. He wanted to see Armenian writers “unfettered, out of rules and crossing the lines”.<sup>831</sup> Therefore, in Sarafian’s view, Armenian writers had to break the moulds and to adopt an experimental literary approach. In order to do this they had to distance themselves from the popular base, which was the bedrock of tradition.

This was against all the literary principles that Mkhitarian and like-minded critics stood for. They were staunch supporters of the popularisation of literature, according to which it had a special social function to mirror collective life, and thereby expose “ethnic” values. Bringing literature to the people was one of their mottos. Conversely, Sarafian advocates literary adventurism and breaking from the traditional Armenian perception of literature.

### *Hybridisation of Armenian literature*

In exile, Armenian writers had to produce their literary works in different cultural climates and they had to interact with local cultures, which was characterised by a modern way of living and thinking. The impact of these cultures was an unavoidable fact, something that Armenian writers and critics grappled with, such as Peniamin Tashian, Vazken Shoushanian, Nigoghos Sarafian, Hrand Palouyian and Garo Sasouni. The advent of technological advancements and scientific discoveries had accelerated the pace of life. This was a huge challenge to Armenian writers, especially in the West where they had to accommodate the values and ways of living of the host countries.

Shoushanian is one of the writers who discuss this issue. He states that many nations were displaced for different reasons, thus bringing diverse cultures into contact, especially in a city

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

like Paris, which was the hub of the universal cultures. Therefore, as far as literature and art were concerned “this circulation of blood between races and nations”<sup>832</sup> was vital.

In the new environment, where diverse cultures were juxtaposed, Shoushanian underscores the necessity of interaction between the different cultural experiences of nations. This was an inevitable occurrence for Armenian writers in diaspora (in this case in France), because on a daily basis they met with these cultures.

The Armenians’ readjustment efforts have also to include the domain of science. The advent of technological innovations changed life completely; of these, Shoushanian mentions cinema, which was becoming an important means of communication between societies, unifying the “soul of people”<sup>833</sup> in “a future brotherhood”.<sup>834</sup> Aeroplanes and the telephone are erasing the concept of distance; especially the latter was a means of spreading the information. All these technological developments, says Shoushanian, bring people and continents together, they “destroy the prejudices”,<sup>835</sup> thus creating common ground for understanding.

Although Shoushanian was against the Modern, he profoundly understood the importance of innovation for life. He abhorred all the decadent aspects of Modern culture and its way of life, except scientific advancements, which he saw as an important achievement in forging universal cultural alliances based on shared values. Cinema conveys pictures that any individual would identify himself/herself with on a wide range of issues, thus bringing them under one umbrella of common concerns. In this sense, Shoushanian perceives the essential role that moving pictures can play in the formation of certain cultural values, around which humanity may unify. The other technological advances also contribute to the formation of common values by directly interconnecting societies. He was one of the first writers in the Armenian diaspora who realised the importance of technological developments in the formation of cultural identity. Conversely, a critic from the senior generation, namely Kourken Mkhitarian complains that because of the advent of moving pictures audiences in theatres began to dwindle.<sup>836</sup> It is beyond this research project to establish the impact of moving pictures on society at large, and particularly the Armenian societies in diaspora in the 1920s. Mkhitarian manifests evident distrust towards new technological art; this stemmed

<sup>832</sup> See Vazken Shoushanian, *Azad Khorhrtadzoutyunner Vaghvan Kraganoutian Masin*, Part III, loc. cit.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid.

<sup>836</sup> Kourken Mkhitarian, *Hay Kraganoutyuné Yev Hay Hasaragoutyuné*, loc. cit., p. 483.

from the fact that he had difficulty in grappling with the function of moving pictures in culture, there was a lack of understanding of the new language of art. Therefore, whatever was not understandable was potentially dangerous. The other unease concerning cinema was the lack of clear vision as to what role it could play in the survival of Armenians in diaspora.

In this context Armenian literature in diaspora faced new challenges. The issue was how to marry up the “national” characteristics of literature with non-Armenian elements. In 1924 Tashian was the first as far as I am aware who realised the future development of Armenian diasporan literature, when he affirmed that it will be composed of the “diverse elements”<sup>837</sup> of the new environment, leading to a “*literary revolution*” [writer’s italics].<sup>838</sup> Here Tashian was making a very significant point; he anticipated the changing face of diasporan literature but he failed to spell out the phenomenon in full. The interplay of two different sets of values, namely the Armenian and of the host nations, would hybridise the Armenian culture. He was fully aware that the break of a new dawn in Armenian literature was imminent, one that would bring the experience of the new environment in sensual, intellectual and spiritual terms of the word. On the other hand, he was also aware of the fact that some writers who still carry the baggage of memories of the homeland will give their experience in literary texts; however, this will not last more than a generation. The flipside of this course of activities could lead Armenians in diaspora to the fate of their brethren in Transylvania and Poland centuries before (see Chapter Six).

Being in Europe, according to Sarafian, gives the opportunity to hybridise Armenian literature; as he puts it: “to develop the national content in the foreign environment and with foreign elements”.<sup>839</sup> However, he says, the central role of the “ethnic” consciousness remains vital in the creative activities of the diasporan writers. He states that the closer writers get to their “ethnological tree”<sup>840</sup> the better their creative works become, and affirms that his generation will achieve this in “non-nationalistic ways”.<sup>841</sup> When Armenians are “unique in soul”,<sup>842</sup> he continues, they are powerful, and no matter what language they speak and to what influences they are subject, the “uniqueness” of the soul will insulate Armenians against alienation.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid. P. Tashian, *Tebi Azkayin Kraganoutyun*, loc. cit., p. 944.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

<sup>839</sup> See Nigoghos Sarafian, *Mdadzoummer*, loc. cit.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid.



Here important questions should be asked: what constitute being “unique” in soul? How will “uniqueness” of soul protect Armenians from alienation? To what degree will it do so? How would the “unique soul” interact with “Other” cultures? Sarafian does not dwell upon these issues. One thing that comes up in this discourse every now and then is the vitality of being “unique”, the corner stone of the future diasporan Armenian cultural identity.

He advocates the idea of enriching Armenian culture, in this case literature, with non-Armenian “elements” of “Other” cultures. This was against the ethnocentric and self-isolationist tendencies of some Armenian intellectuals, for whom there was a distinct demarcation of “ethnic” boundaries. As far as Sarafian was concerned, openness towards the outside world, towards the introduction of new ideas, could only consolidate the literary and philosophical foundations of Armenian literature. Cultural interaction would put Armenian literature into the diverse system of European cultures, a juxtaposition that would expose the flaws in Armenian literature that could then be inoculated against with elements of the other cultures. Although the inclusion of diverse elements from other cultures in the creative process is welcomed, the centre of weight of Armenian literature remains the “ethnic” consciousness. For writers it is a constant reference point, a benchmark against which the Armenianness of their work would be judged.

Palouyian also promoted the same idea of hybridisation, as opposed to isolationism, which was the only way forward for diasporan literature. The most vivid example of this isolation was the case of Tlgadintsi (see Appendix), who was a rural Armenian writer from the previous generation. He states that his literature, although having a distinct Armenian character, lacked literary sophistication. This was because, affirms Palouyian, he was completely isolated from outside world “by the Chinese wall”,<sup>843</sup> by which he meant the Great Wall of China. He had not even read a word of foreign literature, claims Palouyian. The polarised example of this was Michael Arlen, an Armenian writer who wrote exclusively in English, his literature having nothing common with Armenian values. It is true that Tlgadintsi had no command of a foreign language, but I think there is a degree of exaggeration in Palouyian’s comments on Tlgadintsi; this is designed to amplify his argument. It is not easy to say what Tlgadintsi did or did not read in Armenian, especially for Palouyian who knew little about the rural writer in 1928. The patronising attitude towards the older generation, especially by some writers of the new generation is something that I discussed above.

<sup>843</sup> See “Hayrenik” *Amsakrin Hnkamiagé*, Hrand Palouyian Part, II, *Harach*, no. 554, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1928.

According to Palouyian, the only way out of this stalemate is the hybridisation of diasporan Armenian literature. Armenian writers in diaspora especially in Europe (willingly or unwillingly) will bear the influence of Western culture. Had the writers been in their homeland, they would still need the “greatly advanced thinking of Europe”<sup>844</sup> for the development of a “national” literature. Certain characteristically Armenian elements of “national” literature, such as “peculiar character, local colour, beautiful nostalgia that is characteristically ours, unequalled language [and] vivid oriental imagination”<sup>845</sup> coupled with European cultural elements should serve as a cement to “construct new literature”.<sup>846</sup> Palouyian articulates the Armenian element of the hybridised literature, but he fails to specify the non-Armenian elements. For example, what kind of elements would successfully blend with Armenian ones, making the ideal combination?

As far as the renovation of diasporan literature with European elements was concerned, Sarafian and Palouyian shared the same platform. For both of them the inclusion of foreign (in this case European) elements into the creative efforts will only consolidate the aesthetic bases of Armenian literature, in the sense that the example of Tlgadintsi will not be repeated. On the other hand, the Armenian elements were also vital in order not to have the polarised example of Michael Arlen. The endeavours of marrying up the “national” and foreign elements through literature would have another positive effect which was not articulated by Sarafian and Palouyian. The only way to neutralise the danger of the influences of the “alien” world was to embrace it in order to have clear insight into its dynamics, and adapt to it. Self-isolationism would only have the opposite impact by decaying the Armenian intellectual faculty. Another issue was both Sarafian’s and Palouyian’s Eurocentric view. For them Paris (where they and other intellectuals were settled) was the embodiment of Europe, it was the centre of literary and artistic activities of the time. One gets the impression that the results of interaction between Armenian and local cultures in other communities were not important. What about Armenian communities in Cairo, Boston or New York? Were there any cultural values that the new Armenian literary identity could absorb? Part of the answer lies, as I discussed before, in the fact that admiration for European cultures were entrenched in the Western Armenian literary tradition.

For Sasouni the Armenian element in literary production must be the dominant one. On evaluating Gosdan Zarian’s (1885-1969) literary work, he articulates his view on the

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<sup>844</sup> Ibid.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid.

importance of the Armenian characteristics of diasporan literature. Zarian was a Western-educated poet, novelist and critic. His experimental endeavours coupled with his flirtation with universal cultures and thought exposed Armenian literature to wider horizons. His most acclaimed literary works were *Navé Leran Vra* [The Ship on the Mountain] and *Antsorté Yev Ir Jampan* [The Traveller and his Route]. In 1962 he emigrated to Soviet Armenia, where he died. In the first phase of his literary life as a talented Parnassian poet, Zarian wrote in French. Then he learnt Armenian and started the second phase of his literary life. According to Sasouni this was a “return”<sup>847</sup> to his roots. This change occurred when “he listened to the old tradition of the race”<sup>848</sup> and began a new journey in search of his identity. He likens that journey to the traditional pilgrimage of St Garabed of Moush<sup>849</sup> where Zarian would seek the favour of the Armenian gods, who superseded the Parnassian gods. This hybrid nature of Zarian’s talent Sasouni depicts as Zarian’s having his right foot on Mount Ararat and the other foot on the Eiffel Tower, thus conjoining Europe and Asia. The symbolism employed by Sasouni is quite striking: Ararat would symbolise everything that stands for Armenianness and the Eiffel Tower all the non-Armenian values that would become an inherent part of the Armenian identity. The centre of the weight should always be Ararat, in other words the Armenian identity should be a predominant component of Armenian literary production. This was expressed in the imagery of the right foot being firmly planted in Mount Ararat. The right foot was generally considered the one that kept the body’s balance, thus the right foot on top of Ararat signifies the importance of having a stable foothold, as Sasouni would call it the “traditional prop”,<sup>850</sup> by which he meant the Armenian cultural background.

<sup>847</sup> See *Nor Kraganoutian Masin*, Garo Sasouni, Part IV, *Harach*, no. 563, 5<sup>th</sup> February, Paris, 1928.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> The monastery of St Garabed of Moush was situated in the birthplace of Sasouni, and most interestingly he was born the day of the pilgrimage.

<sup>850</sup> See *Nor Kraganoutian Masin*, Garo Sasouni, Part II, *Harach*, no. 559, 1<sup>st</sup> February, Paris, 1928.

### Conclusion

In the years following the period discussed in this thesis some of the issues raised in post-Genocide diasporan literary critical circles in some degree lost their intensity and even relevance, but they did not disappear. Every now and then they resurfaced and they had a fair following. The issues of exposing the Armenian milieu, formulating of the literary principle, exposing of ethnic values in diasporan literature and the feasibility of creating homeland-bound literature were intrinsically connected to the fate of the survival of Armenians in diaspora.

First of all the geography of diasporan literature became clearer. While in the 1920s there was some ambiguity over whether literature should deal with the lost homeland or geographically unspecified spaces where Armenian life was thriving, from the 1930s onward that space became more specific.

Time showed that depiction of the homeland was infeasible. The first and successive generations of diasporan writers depicted the diasporan milieu into which they were thrown. This trend included the renowned figures of the first generation, such as Shahan Shahnour, Zareh Vorpouni, Vazken Shoushanian, Garo Poladian and others. The writers who had memory of the homeland, such as Vahé Hayk, Peniamin Nourigian, Hamasdegh and Hagop Mntsour, were a minority. In the case of Hamasdegh, after the publication of his two seminal collections of short stories depicting the rural life of homeland, the baggage of memory dried up. Hamasdegh's future work lacked the calibre of his previous works. Therefore, the demand for depicting the homeland in literature had lost its charm, which was due to two factors. Firstly, the absence of the homeland although it left the next generation permanently scarred they did not depict the former life of their fathers and mothers. They lacked the experience and feeling of being in the homeland. However, they conceptualised the homeland, and the fragment of memory combined with the narratives about homeland culminated in the production of literature which evoked the dim memory of homeland. This applies especially to the writers of the first and the second generations. Some of the evocative and patriotic poems of Vahé Vahian, Moushegh Ishkhan and Jack S. Hagopian are typical examples. Secondly, the absence of the homeland from the 1940s onwards was substituted by Soviet Armenia especially after the mass migration [*nerkaght*].

Literature dedicated to the nature and life in the areas of Soviet Armenia filled the gap of rural literature that was created by the loss of homeland. In this domain Agsel Pagounts' prose writings, dedicated to rural Armenia, satisfied the thirst of diasporan Armenians. This also created a new kind of nostalgia towards for the equally unknown homeland. As far as literature was concerned, Soviet Armenia played a crucial role in propping up the national identity of Armenians. Of course, in the political domain the role of Soviet Armenia was controversial and divisive.

Therefore, the belief in the importance of homeland for the creation of ethnic literature proved to be wrong. Over the coming decades the debate concerning the exposition of ethnic value continued intermittently and with a different intensity. The definition of "ethnic" diasporan Armenian literature had been reshaped and somehow in some degree had been loosened, according to the various socio-cultural climates. Of course, there were still core nationalist minor critics who promoted an exclusively "ethnic" literature, be that depicting the life of homeland or the adherence to other Armenian values, whatever they may be. From the 1920s and the following decades a new concept emerges and solidifies its position not only in literature, but also in other domains, such as art and education. The concepts like *hayetsi kraganoutyun* [distinct Armenian literature] or *hayetsi grtoutyun* [distinct Armenian education] became the mantra of majority diasporan Armenian literary critics and intellectuals in the efforts to perpetuate the "ethnic" survival in foreign countries. The definition of *hayetsi kraganoutyun* was ambiguous; it did not spell out clearly as any academic enterprise will sought. However, in general terms it referred to certain characteristics which would make Armenian literature different from, say, French literature. But the main criterion was the language factor: Armenian literature meant and means a literature which is written in Armenian, language being the time capsule of Armenian culture.

Depiction of the homeland would not be practical for the diasporan Armenian literature. Eventually the critics came to terms with the urban setting of diasporan Armenian literature, which would decide its interaction with enormous spaces and their bustling life was an experience which against the backdrop of a serene idealisation of lost homeland and the memories of Genocide created conflict, thus recalling the pain of exilic life. Some writers took up the challenge of writing in Armenian on the Armenian milieu, such as Shahan Shahnour, Bedros Zaroyian, Antranig Dzarougian and others. After the publication of his first collection of poems, Levon Zaven Surmelian gave up writing in Armenian and instead

wrote in English. Shahan Shanour published collections of poems in French under the pen name of Armen Lupen, but he remained integral to diasporan Armenian literature, since he continued to write in Armenian as well. Some Armenian writers sometimes wrote on the foreign milieu, such as the USA-based writers Antranig Antreasian and Aram Haygaz. Another group of writers of Armenian descent wrote in foreign languages on Armenians subject matter, such as the contemporary writer Antonina Arslan, who writes in Italian. Some writers wrote in different languages on non-Armenian subject matters; such a writer was the French writer of Armenian descent Henry Troyat, who always concealed his real identity. The American writer William Saroyan wrote in English with plenty of references to his Armenian roots, and he always identified himself with Armenians and their cultural heritage. The formation and in other cases emergence of all these heterogeneous literary identities compelled literary critics to redefine their principle and to adopt a new strategy. Not only did they accept writers like William Saroyan, they revered him as an American writer of Armenian descent, and they were proud of him.

The formation and/or imposition of any kind of literary principles did not come to pass. There were random efforts to regroup around certain literary principles: one such instance was the regrouping of Paris-based writers around the literary journal *Menk* [We], but it did not develop into a full discourse.

When a modernist trend emerged in diasporan Armenian literature, some nationalist literary critics were suspicious towards the innovative quest of the new writers. The guardians of Armenian values did not have enough sophistication to appraise the new developments in the literary world. Their inability to marry up Armenian values with modern concepts was another reason for their dismissive attitude.

From the 1950s onwards the modernist efforts of diasporan literature began to gather momentum. In a fast-changing world, the literary critics and writers underlined the importance of keeping pace with the rest of the world. This was a step forward for Armenian thought in the post-Genocide period. The initiative came from Paris-based people of letter, especially those who gathered around the literary journal *Antasdan* [Field] (1952-1969), such as Pyuzant Topalian, Garo Poladian and others. The politically and culturally free environment made this development happen. In post-World War II period Beirut became the main centre of production for diasporan literature. In the 1960s the second generation of writers and critics such as Krikor Beledian, Haroutyun Kyurkjian and others came on to the literary scene, who gathered around the innovative literary journal *Ahegan* (1966-1970). The

modernist effort in Armenian literature is connected to this publication. Unfortunately this publication did not survive due to unfriendly attitude towards it by nationalist elements.

All in all in order to be considered an Armenian writer for both nationalist and modernist trends was the importance of the domineering role of the Armenian element in the creative endeavours of the diasporan writers. Whether their creative journey was a pilgrimage to St Garabed of Moush, where they would ask the grace of the Armenian god, or they were in one of the cafeterias of Boulevard St Michelle in Paris deliberating their fate of being a diasporan Armenian in the West, wherever they were situated, their right foot should always be firmly planted on Mount Ararat, the symbol of Armenian identity.

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## Appendix

### Writers, Critics and Editors

**Aharonian, Avedis** (1866-1948) was an Eastern Armenian writer and political activist. He received his higher education in Literature in Sorbonne in 1901. He was a member of the ARF party. In 1918 he became speaker of the newly independent Armenian Parliament. His most acclaimed work is the two-volume *Im Kirké* [My Book]. The first volume was subtitled *Mangoutyun* [Childhood] (1927), the second volume was *Badanegoutyun* [Adolescence] (1931).

**Alboyajian, Arshag** (1879-1962) was an intellectual who graduated from Berberian Varzharan in Constantinople. He emigrated to Egypt in 1922, where he worked as a teacher.

**Alishan, Father Ghevont** (1820-1901) was a renowned Western Armenian historian, philologist, pedagogue and above all poet in the romantic tradition. He was ordained a member of the Mkhitarist order in Venice. His entire research was dedicated to the Armenian homeland, her history, geography and culture. His poems are the testimony of a great patriot.

**Arlen, Michael** (1895-1956) (Armenian name Dikran Kouyoumdjian) was a British writer born in Ruse (Bulgaria) in an Armenian family. He was the son of a wealthy Armenian merchant, who during the Genocide with his family took refuge in London, where Dikran was in the company of acclaimed writers such as D. H. Lawrence and George Moore. One of his novels "The Green Hat" was a meteoric success, which brought fame to the writer in Great Britain and the United States.

**Arpiarian, Arpiar** (1851 - 1908) was one of the pioneers and a staunch supporter of the Realist literary tradition in Western Armenian literature. He was the victim of an assassination perpetrated by fellow Armenians. He was the founder of the following journals; *Arevelk* [East] (1884, Constantinople), *Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (1891, Constantinople), and *Nor Gyank* [New Life] (1896, London). His acclaimed work is *Garmir Zhamouts* [The Crimson Offertory] (1909).

**Asadour, Hrant** (1862-1928) was an advocate of the Realist literary movement in Constantinople. With the collaboration of Krikor Zohrab he published the literary supplement

of *Masis* newspaper in 1892. His acclaimed work was *Timasdverner* [Portraits] (Constantinople, 1921) in which he presented many of Constantinople's prominent figures.

**Asadour, Zabel** (pseudonym Sibil) (1863-1934) was a poet, prose writer, translator, feminist and pedagogue. With the collaboration of her second husband, Hrant Asadour, she published the series of school textbooks *Tankaran* [Museum]. She lived and died in Constantinople.

**Barsamian, Mgrdich** (1886-1965) was an instructor, critic, writer and publisher. He emigrated to France in 1922, where with his brother Merouzhn he published the literary and artistic periodical *Gyiank Yev Arvesd* [Life and Art] (1931-1940).

**Berberian, Reteos** (1851 - 1907) was a poet, educator, intellectual and the father of a talented family. Of his three sons, Onig was a musician, Ardavazt a painter, and Shahan a renowned thinker and aesthete; his daughter, Manig, was a poet and prose writer. He was the founder of the renowned Berberian Varzharan in Constantinople.

**Beshigtashlian, Mgrdich** (1828-1868) was born in Constantinople. He was a Western Armenian Romantic poet, playwright and cultural and social activist.

**Cheraz, Minas** (1852-1929) was a writer, educator, and a cultural and political activist. He is best known for his work *Kragan Portser* [Literary Attempts] published in 1874. He is also the author of two volumes of stories in French, "Orient Inédit" and "Nouvelles Orientales". He was a member of the Armenian delegation in the Berlin Congress.

**Chobanian, Arshag** (1872-1954) was born in Constantinople, where he received his secondary education in Getronagan Varzharan. He began his writing career when he was still a student, by translating into Armenian the French writers Emile Zola, Gustav Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. In 1891 at the age of 19 he became assistant editor of the periodical *Hayrenik* (1870-1896; 1909-1910, Constantinople). He published the literary periodical *Dzaghig* in 1895 and *Anahid* (1898-1911; 1929-1940; 1946-1949, Paris). For a short time in 1918 he was also the editor of *Veradzenount* [Revival] (1917-1921). During the years 1926-1931 he was a member of the editorial board of the LDP's official Parisian organ *Abaka*. He was one of the acclaimed literary critics of his generation.

**Choubar, Yeghia** (1887-1938) received his elementary education (1906-1912) in the seminary of Nor Nakhichevan (Rostov, Russia) before furthering his education there. After a short flirtation with the ARF party he embraced Communism. In nascent Soviet Armenia he held many high positions. He was either editor or member of the editorial board of the following journals and periodicals: *Panvori Griv* [Worker's Struggle] (1920, Nor



Nakhichevan, 33 issues), *Kharibgit* (1920, Nor Naghichevan, 12 issues), *Communist* (1920-1921, Yerevan, 92 issues), *Aghkad Kyughatsi* [Poor Villager] (1921, Yerevan, 20 issues), *Garmir Koutan* [The Red Plough] (1921, Yerevan, 7 issues), *Garmir Zinvor* [The Red Soldier] (1921-1938, Gharakilisé-Yerevan), *Sovedagan Hayasdan* [Soviet Armenia] (1921-1990, Yerevan), *Ashkhadank* [Work] (1922-1929, Yerevan), *Majgal* [Ploughman] (1922-1931, Yerevan), *Nor Agos* [The New Furrow] (1924-1925, Yerevan, 23 issues), *Verelk* [The Ascent] (1924, 1926, Yerevan, 5 issues).

In 1925 the Soviet Armenian authorities sent him to Paris, where he published the journal *Yerevan* (1925-1930, Paris). He was a victim of the purge of Stalin.

**Derian, Vahan** (1885-1920) Eastern Armenian poet, who most of his life lived in Russia. His most acclaimed poetic work is *Mtnshaghi Anourchner* [Twilight Dreams] (1908). He died at an early age from tuberculosis.

**Desdegyul, Nshan** (1889-90?-1931) was born in Palou (mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey). He was a prominent figure in the Armenian literary circles of the USA. He received his MA from Brown University (my efforts to establish the major of his MA degree were fruitless). He made important contributions to the periodicals *Christian Science Monitor*, and the Boston-based *Hayrenik* (newspaper and monthly) and *Pyunig*. He had a close affiliation with the ARF party.

He published scores of literary works, such as *Tarerou Entmechen* [Through the Centuries] (1912), *Krelou Arvesdé* [The Art of Writing], *Mer Giankin Vebé* [The Novel of Our Life], and *Amerigahay Harsnatsoun* [Armenian-American Bride].

**Gamsaragan, Dikran** (1866-1941) was a prose writer in the Realist tradition. His most acclaimed novel was *Varzhabedin Aghchigé* [The Daughter of the School Master]. His last literary production dates back to 1910. He engages himself in trade and moves to Paris, where he becomes an active member of AGBU.

**Gyurjian, Melkon** or **Hrant** (pseudonym) (1859-1915) was a Western Armenian writer in the Realist tradition. He was born in mainland Armenia. After receiving his primary education in his birthplace, he came to Constantinople for his secondary education. He was actively involved in Armenian life within Ottoman Turkey and abroad, where he lived in exile like other Armenian writers during the Hamidian persecutions. His literary works portrayed the plight of the provincial Armenian immigrant labourers in Constantinople known as *bantoukhd*. He was a victim of the Genocide.

**Hamasdegh** (1895-1966) (real name Hampartsoum Gelenian) was a poet, novelist and playwright, but he was acclaimed for his short stories. He was born in Perchenj village in the province of Kharpert (mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey). He emigrated to the USA in 1913, where he began to write short stories about his village in *Hayrenik* newspaper and its monthly literary supplement (for details see Chapter Three).

**Haroutyunian, Ardashes** (1873-1915), was born in Malgara (Turkey). He was a poet and literary critic. His poetic collections are *Lkvadz Knar* [Abandoned Harp] (1902), *Yergounk* [Pang] (1906), and *Nor Knar* [New Harp] (1912). He was a victim of the Armenian Genocide.

**Hayg, Vahé** (1896-1983) was a writer and editor. He was born in the province of Kharpert. After receiving his elementary education in Sourp Sdepanos school and his secondary education in the well-known Yeprad College, he furthered his higher education in Constantinople (1915-1918). He emigrated to the USA in 1920, where he published five collections of short stories under the title of *Hayreni Dzkhan* [The Patrimonial Chimney].

**Kamar-Katiba** (pseudonym) (real name Rafayel Badganian) (1830-1892) Eastern Armenian Romantic poet. Part of his literary work consisted of patriotic poems, which gained him a modest place in the hierarchy of Armenian literature.

**Khrimian, Mgrdich** (1820-1907) (pseudonym Kherimian Hayrig) was a prominent member of the Armenian clergy, he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople in 1869, then Catholicos of Echmiadzin in 1892. He was also a writer, educator and publisher. He was the first person to establish a printing press in the Monastery of Varak in rural Armenia, where he published *Ardzvi Vasbouragan* [Eagle of Vasbouragan] (1858-1864).

**Mamouljian, Roupen** (1897-1987) was a renowned theatrical and film director. He made his name in the 1920s in the Eastman Theatre and Theatre Guild in New York before moving to Hollywood, where he shot numerous films such as “City Streets” (1931), “Becky Sharp” (1935), “The Mark of Zorro” (1940) and “Blood and Sand” (1941).

**Medzarents, Misak** (1886-1908) was a celebrated Western Armenian lyric poet. He died at a very young age from tuberculosis. His poetic works are *Dziadzan* [Rainbow] (1907) and *Nor Dagher* [New Odes] (1907).

**Misakian, Shavarsh** (1884-1957) was born in the province of Sepasdia (mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey). As soon as he graduated from Getronagan Varzharan at the age of 16 he launched his journalistic career. With many prominent Constantinople Armenian writers such as Zabel Yesayian, Kegham Parseghian and Vahram Tatoul, he published the

periodical *Aztag* [Factor] (1908-1909, Constantinople, 41 issues). For a period of time he became the editor of *Harach* [Forward] (1909-1914, Garin). Misakian consecutively published some short-lived periodicals, namely the newspaper *Aztag* (1912-1913, Constantinople, 3 issues), *Alik* [Wave] (1914, Garin, 16 issues) and *Yergir* (1914, Garin, 9 issues). After the Armistice, with the collaboration of some colleagues such as Hagop Sirouni and Kourken Mkhitarian, he published *Jagadamard* (1914-1915; 1918-1924 Constantinople) and *Artaramard* (1918, Constantinople).

Like all other Armenian intellectuals, when the Kemalist movement reached Constantinople in 1922, Shavarsh Misakian was forced to leave the city, moving initially to Sofia and then settling in Paris. In 1925 he published the newspaper *Harach* (1925-1940; 1945-present, Paris).

Misakian was a devoted member of the higher echelons of the ARF party; he became a member of the party Bureau in 1925. During the years 1925-1933, together with Simon Vratsian and Arshag Chamalian, he published the official ARF organ *Troshag*.

**Mkhitarian, Kourken** (1890-1962) was born in Shabin Karahisar (mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey), where he received his elementary education. Then he continued his secondary education in Getronagan Varzharan in Constantinople, from which he graduated in 1912. He taught in the schools of his birthplace and in Constantinople. After the Armistice he became the editor of the newspaper *Jagadamard* in Constantinople until 1922, when he emigrated to Egypt. In Cairo he published the literary weekly *Nor Sharzhoum* and became the assistant editor and then editor of the newspaper *Housaper*. In 1948 he settled in the USA, where he became the editor of *Hayrenik* (newspaper) in 1952. Mkhitarian was one of the few literary critics in diaspora. His critical work was a reflection of his impressionist approach towards literature. He never systematised his own critical tenets.

**Nartouni, Shavarsh** (1898-1968) was born in Armash. In 1927 he graduated from the medical university of Paris. His renowned works are *Hekiatnerou Albom* [Album of Tales], *Meghetiner, Meghetiner* [Tunes, Tunes] and *Yerousaghem, Yerousaghem* [Jerusalem, Jerusalem].

**Natali, Shahan** (1884-1983) (real name Hagop Der Hagopian) was born in the province of Kharpert. He lost his father during the Hamidian massacres of 1895-1896. From 1897 to 1901 he received his secondary education in Berberian Varzharan. In 1904 he settled in the USA. He was an active member of the ARF party. The assassinations of some of the perpetrators of the Genocide, such as Talaat Pasha, were masterminded by Natali.

Along with his political career Natali was involved in the intellectual endeavours of the diaspora. Although his work was little known he made a considerable contribution to the promotion of intellectual values in diaspora. He published the short-lived literary periodical *Shant* [Lightning] (1910, Boston, 4 issues). He was one of the members, along with Nshan Desdegyul, of the editorial board of the periodical *Pyunig* (1918-1920, Boston). A literary critic, poet, playwright and prose writer, his creative works included *Shanteré* [Lightnings] (1907, Boston), *Amber* [Clouds] (1909, Constantinople), *Aslan Beg* (1918, Boston) and *Vrezhi Avedaran* vol. 2 [The Gospel of Vengeance] (1918 Boston) to name a few.

**Navasartian, Vahan** (1888-1956) was born in Shoushi (nowadays Mountainous Gharapagh); he read economics at St Petersburg University. After becoming a member of the ARF his whole life revolved around the party. During the battle of Sardarabad in 1918 he fought against the Turkish army. In 1919 he was elected member of Armenian parliament. After the failed putsch of February against the Soviet regime in 1921 he permanently took refuge in Egypt. Throughout his life he remained a staunch critic of Soviet Armenia.

He was involved in a series of publications of journals, such as *Horizon* (1909-1918, Tiflis), *Nor Horizon* [New Horizon] (1918, Tiflis), *Harach* (1919-1920, Yerevan). From 1922 he was the editor of *Housaper* (1913-present, Cairo), with the cooperation of assistant editors, namely Kourken Mkhitarian and Peniamin Tashian.

**Nourigian, Peniamin** (1897-1988) was born in Kharpert. He emigrated to the USA in 1913. He was awarded an MA degree in literature and history by Columbia University in New York. His well known work is *Aykegoutk* [The Harvest] (New York, 1937).

**Oshagan, Hagop.** Oshagan's (1883-1948) contribution to Armenian literature as a novelist and literary critic remains unparalleled. He was from a village called Seoleoz in the region of Brousa (nowadays Turkey), where he received his elementary education. For one academic year (1899-1900) he attended the Armenian seminary of Armash, which is where his academic achievements ended – the rest of his life was a continuous effort of self-development. He was an avid reader of Armenian and European literatures, his preferred novelists being Dostoyevsky and Balzac. From 1900 to 1908 he worked as a teacher in the schools of the Armenian villages. After the proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908 he went to Constantinople, where he contributed to the literary life of the city. He wrote in the periodical of *Aztag* and newspaper *Azadamard* and was the driving force behind the publications *Mehian* (1914) and *Partsravank* (1922) in Constantinople. In the diaspora

Oshagan continued his modest life as an educator in Melkonian Varzharan in Nicosia and the seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

His rise to prominence as a novelist and critic was also connected to the post-Genocide phase of his life, when he published *Khonarhner* [The Humble] (1920, Constantinople), *Yerp Badani Yen* [When they are Youths] (1926, Constantinople), *Mnatsortats* [Remnants] (1932-1934, Cairo, three volumes), *Haji Mourad* (1933), *Haji Abdullah* (1934) and others. Oshagan depicts the world of passion-driven villagers, their inextinguishable yearnings and unattainable aspirations. He plunges into their souls and sheds light on the deepest corners there with an elaborate and ornate style. He is rightly regarded as the high priest of the Armenian novel.

His critical endeavours match the pre-eminence of his creativity. He is the author of colossal critical achievements, of which it is important to mention the seminal work of ten large volumes *Hamabadger Arevmdahay Kraganoutian* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature] (it was published over a long period of time, from 1945 to 1982, in Jerusalem, Beirut and Antelias). In it Oshagan illustrated the history of Western Armenian literature from the 1840s to the eve of the Genocide of 1915. Through the portraits of around 50 writers he recreates the picture of a whole era, with a touch of personal experience (he was one of the active participants of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and critical erudition. His literary verdicts were bold and sharp, although not immune from contradictions. Oshagan relied not only on his intellect for his critical judgments, but also on the sensuous impressions a work of literature left on him. He had a great impact on the diasporan literary critics.

**Palouyian, Hrand** (1904-1968) was an art and literary critic, whose domain of interest included different art forms. He received his education in Getronagan Varzharan in Constantinople. In 1922 he emigrated to France and settled in Paris. He was the publisher of the literary periodical *Zvartnots* in 1929 in Paris.

**Parseghian, Kegham** (1883-1915) was a journalist and writer, the collection of his work was published posthumously in Paris in 1931. He was a victim of the Armenian Genocide.

**Pashalian, Levon** (1868-1943) was a Western Armenian prose writer in the Realist tradition. The creative years of Pashalian stretch until the turn of the century, when he took different positions in petroleum companies in Baku. In 1920 he moved to Paris, where he contributed in the efforts to reorganise Armenian life. He became the editor of the French-Armenian monthly “Le Foyer”.

**Raffi** (1837-1888) (real name Hagop Melik Hagopian) was born in the rural part of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, after receiving his primary education in his birthplace, for a short period of time he continued his education in Tiflis. His main works are *Tavit Peg* (1881), *Gaydzer* [Sparks] (1883), *Samouel* (1888) and others.

**Rousinian, Nahabed** (1819-1876) was a Paris-educated liberal intellectual from Constantinople. He was instrumental in the adoption of the vernacular and the National Constitution in 1863.

**Sarafian, Nigoghos** (1902-1972) was born on a ship en route from Constantinople to Varna, where his parents settled after fleeing the Hamidian massacres of 1895-1896. He received his elementary education in the local Armenian schools. He continued his education in the school of Saint-Michel des Frères, where he learned French. After the outbreak of World War I until 1917 he left for Romania, then to Odessa, Rostov, Crimea and Novorossiysk. During this period he worked as a labourer. He returned to Varna, then, in 1919 in order to further his education he was sent to Constantinople. Until 1922 he attended Getronagan Varzharan, where Hagop Oshagan and Vahan Tekeyian were among his educators. They were the ones who supported and encouraged his hesitant literary steps. For a short period of time he went back to Varna, only to move again, however, this time to settle in Paris in 1923. He worked in a printing house and lived a very modest life. His preferred genre of literary expression was poetry, in which domain he contributed to the renovation of Armenian poetry (also see Chapter Three).

**Sasouni, Garo** (1889-1977) was born in Sasoun. He received his elementary education there and also in Moush from 1897 to 1906. The same year he became a teacher in Dikranagerd (Diarbekir) (all mentioned settlements were situated in mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey) until 1908. From the early age of 15 he became a member of the ARF party. From 1909-1914 (except the year 1913) he studied law at the university of Constantinople. After the outbreak of World War I he took refuge in the Caucasus, where he was actively involved in political and military activities, organising the volunteer groups of the Armenian fighters. In 1919 he became a member of the Armenian parliament and in 1921 took part in the February revolt against Soviet Armenian authorities. The following decade he mainly lived in Paris, before settling permanently in Beirut.

Aside from his political writings, Sasouni also produced a collection of short stories, namely *Lernerou Khorhourté* [Mystery of the Mountains] (Beirut, 1934), and in 1951 in Beirut he published *Badmoutyun Arevmdahay Arti Kraganoutian* [History of Contemporary

Western Armenian Literature]. His literary and critical endeavours were always overshadowed by his political activities and writings, which made him one of the less influential figures in both domains.

**Shant, Levon** (1869-1951), a renowned Armenian playwright and diligent pedagogue, was born in Constantinople. After receiving his elementary education in the Armenian school of Sgyudar, in 1884 he continued his education in the seminary of Kevorkian Jemaran in the Holy See of Echmiadzin in Armenia. In 1892 he completed his higher education in the universities of Leipzig and Munich, reading psychology and natural sciences. In 1899 he settled in Tiflis where he was actively involved in literary and educational activities.

He became a member and the speaker of the Armenian parliament in 1919. After the Sovietisation of Armenia, like others as a member of the ARF party, he left the country. He lived in Marseille until 1925 and then in 1926 the call of duty urged him to go to Alexandria, where he became an educationalist. He permanently settled in Beirut in 1929, where in the same year he founded along with Nigol Aghpalian the well-known Armenian college Hay Jemaran.

Shant wrote scores of poetic works, novels and novellas, but he is best known for his plays such as *Hin Asdvadzner* [The Old Gods] (1912), *Gaysré* [The Emperor] (1916), *Sheghtayvadzé* [The Enchained] (1918) and *Ingadz Perti Ishkhanouhin* [The Princess of the Fallen Fortress] (1918). Shant was influenced by Ibsen and Nietzsche and one can see this in his characters' philosophical observations. As I discussed in Chapter One, apart from his literary output, Shant dedicated a considerable amount of his time to pedagogical and other cultural undertakings.

**Shoushanian, Vazken** (1903-1941) was born in the seaside town of Rodosto (Turkey) on the Black Sea. During the Genocide he lost all of his family, first his father, then his mother, sister and brother. As the only survivor, he took refuge in Aleppo. After Armistice he went to Constantinople, then to Armash where he attended the agricultural school. In 1920 after the closure of the school he was sent to Armenia, only to leave again, this time as a result of the Sovietisation of Armenia. In 1921 he returned to Constantinople, then for a short period of time to his birthplace, the same year he settled in France. Marseille was the first stop in his newly adopted country, where he worked in the Renault car factory. From 1923 to 1927 he attended to the agronomical school of Valabre and in the same year as his graduation he went to Paris. The emotional and physical sufferings took its toll on his health, which was the cause of his premature death.

The life of Shoushanian was characterised by struggles and animosity; he was a restless soul and he did not fit any social, political or aesthetic mould. All of the cultural activities in which he was involved one way or another had abrupt and acrimonious ends. This was the case with his contributions to the literary association of Hartkogh and the periodical *Menk*. He showed the same trend in his political conviction, when in 1933 with a group of like-minded people, he revolted against his own party, namely the ARF, which he had supported arduously. This movement was known as Mardgotsagan Sharzhoum [Movement of Bastion], which even published its own journal *Mardgots* [Bastion] (1932-1933, Paris). In a very short space of time he also became disenchanted by this movement.

Shoushanian was less known for his poetry than his prose writing. I will name a handful of his works, such as *Karnanayin* (*Siro Hez Namagner*) [Vernal (Gentle Letters of Love)] (1928, Paris), *Amran Kisherner* [Summer Nights] (1930, Cairo), *Siro Yev Argadzi Dghaké* [Of Loving and Adventurous Youngsters] (1958, Beirut).

**Siamanto** (1878-1915) (real name Adom Yarjanian) was an acclaimed Western Armenian poet, whose literary works bore the witness of the sufferings of Armenians under Sultan Hamid's tyranny. Through his poetry he also disseminated the ideas of freedom and revolt. *Tyutsaznoren* [Heroically] (1902), *Hayortiner* [Armenians] (1905), *Garmir Lourer Paregames* [Red News from my Friend] (1909), and others. He was a victim of the Genocide.

**Sirouni, Hagop** (1890-1973) (real name Hagop Jololian) was born in Adapazar (Turkey); he completed his elementary education there, moving on to secondary education in Constantinople. Between the years 1909-1913 he furthered his education in the faculty of law at the University of Constantinople. He was involved in the political activities of the ARF party, which resulted in his incarceration twice by Ottoman Turks in Constantinople, in 1908 and 1913. During the mayhem of the Armenian Genocide he went into hiding in Constantinople for three years from 1915 to 1918. He emigrated to Romania in 1922, where he continued his literary and scholarly career. Sirouni published two collections of poems, namely *Mtnshagh* [Twilight] (1908), *Tebi Dajari Hrashkin* [Towards the Miracle of the Temple] (1914).

As a publisher and editor he made a crucial input to the development of the literary printed press in Constantinople and the diaspora. He contributed immensely to the publication of the following journals: *Azadamard* (1909-1914; 1918-1921, Constantinople) and *Jagadamard* (1914-1915; 1918-1924, Constantinople), *Artaramard* (1918,



Constantinople), *Ariamard* (1918 Constantinople), *Nor Arshalouys* [New Dawn] (1922-1934, Bucharest), and *Navasart* (1914, Constantinople, almanac; 1923-1926 Bucharest, periodical). *Navasart* was first published in Constantinople with the contribution of Taniel Varouzhan and then Sirouni continued to publish it single-handedly in Bucharest. Here the crucial role of *Navasart* (24 issues) in promoting the Western Armenian literary traditions in diaspora should also be underscored. It also contributed to shaping literary understanding by emphasising the indispensability of creative production based on aesthetics and without secondary considerations such as politics.

**Srvantsdians, Bishop Karekin** (1840-1892) was an oral archivist, who traveled throughout the Armenian provinces and gathered the crude materials of the oral tradition.

**Tarpinian, Roupen** (real name Ardashes Chilingarian) (1883-1968) was born in the densely Armenian-populated region of Akhalkalak (nowadays Georgia). After completing secondary school in Tiflis, he furthered his education in Germany in the universities of Heidelberg and Munich and graduated as a lawyer. He was actively involved in the political activities in the ranks of the ARF party from 1906 to 1920, when he headed the Ministry of Justice of the first Republic of Armenia. After the Sovietisation of Armenia he was arrested by Communists and incarcerated until 1921. After the anti-Soviet revolt of February 1921 he fled to Tehran then Boston.

His journalistic career began in the periodicals of *Mshag* [Tiller] (1872-1921, Tiflis) and *Mourj* [Hammer] (1889-1907, Tiflis). He assumed the position of editor of the periodicals *Arev* [Sun] (1914-1919, Baku) until 1916, then the periodical *Kordz* [Work] (1917-1918, Baku). After the independence of Armenia the centre of Tarpinian's activities was in the nascent Armenian Republic, where with other intellectuals he published the journals *Harach* [Forward] (1919-1920, Yerevan, organ of ARF), *Azad Hayasdan* [Free Armenia] (1921, Yerevan). The last phase of his journalistic career was closely connected to the *Hayrenik* (Boston) newspaper and monthly. The two main subjects of his writing were politics and art.

**Tashian, Peniamin** (1896-1971) was born in Adapazar (Turkey). He received his elementary education in his birthplace, then for higher education he moved to Constantinople. After the Armistice he taught in Constantinople. He emigrated to Egypt in 1923 and became the editor of the Cairo-based ARF organ newspaper *Housaper*.

**Tekeyian, Vahan** (1878-1945) was born in Constantinople where he received his elementary and secondary education in Berberian and Getronagan schools. As a trading company employee he travelled to many European cities such as Liverpool, Manchester,

Hamburg and Marseille in 1896. In 1905-1908 he settled in Alexandria where he published the literary periodical *Shirag* (1905, Alexandria; 1906-1907, Cairo; 1909, Constantinople). In 1908, after the proclamation of Ottoman Constitution, which brought much-needed freedoms within the Ottoman Empire, Tekeyian returned to his birthplace and was involved in literary activities in the post-Hamidian period; he became an active member of the LDP. After the Armistice he returned to Constantinople and in 1921 he became the editor of the official LDP organ *Zhoghovourti Tsayn* [The Voice of the People] (1918-1922, Constantinople, newspaper). In 1926 he settled in Cairo and became the editor of *Arev* (first from 1915 to 1920, then from 1927 to 1929), which was the official LDP organ in Egypt.

Tekeyian lived a nomadic life, always following the call of duty. He was closely involved in the post-Genocide efforts of retrieving and giving shelter to the Armenian orphans. His literary career began as early as 1894 when he first published in the journal *Hayrenik* (1870-1896; 1909-1910, Constantinople); later he became the editor of the same journal.

He was one of the distinguished poets of his generation, whose literary production is characterised by lyricism punctuated with philosophical reflections. Some of his poetic collections are *Hoker* [Worries] (Paris, 1901), *Hrashali Haroutyun* [Wonderful Rebirth] (Constantinople, 1914), *Geskisherer Minchev Arshalouys* [From Midnight to Dawn] (Paris, 1919), *Ser* [Love] (Paris, 1933) and others. His poetic talent was instrumental in bridging the Western Armenian poetic traditions and diasporan poetry. His impact on the first generation of diasporan poets was enormous, some of the young poets remaining under his poetic spell.

Tekeyian had a productive journalistic career. Apart from the above-mentioned periodicals he also contributed as a writer and editor to the following periodicals: *Arevelk* [East] (1884-1896; 1898-1912, Constantinople), *Azad Pem* [Free Platform] (1903-1905, Alexandria; 1906-1907, Cairo), *Lousaper* [Light Deliverer] (1904-1908, Cairo), *Orenk* [Law] (1905, Alexandria) and *Nor Zhamanagner* [New Times] (1906, Cairo).

**Tlgadintsi** (1860-1915) (real name Hovhannes Haroutyunian) was born in the village Khoulou in the province of Kharpert. He received his education in his birthplace. He opens his own school in Kharpert. He was a victim of the Armenian Genocide. The subject matter of his works was the rural life. He wrote poems, short stories, novellas, plays and chronicles. His complete works posthumously was published in Boston in 1927.

**Toumanian, Hovhannes** (1869-1923) is a renowned Eastern Armenian poet. He was born and bred in the village of Tesegh (nowadays Republic of Armenia). It was rich not only with its oral literary tradition but also with nature, which had deep impact on his literary

production. He was one of the few poet who cultivated folkloric materials for his literary productions. His main literary works are *Anoush*, *Sasountsi Tavit* [David of Sasoun], *Mi Gatil Meghr* [A Drop of Honey] and others.

**Tourian, Archbishop Yeghishé** (1860-1930) was the younger brother of the pre-eminent Romantic poet Bedros Tourian. A respected poet in his own right, his acclaimed work was the collection of poems *Hovagan Srink* [Shepherd's Flute] (1909, Smyrna). He dedicated most of his time to administrative ecclesiastical work, holding very high positions in the hierarchy. He was elected the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1909 but resigned two years later. In 1921 he was elected the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Jerusalem.

**Varouzhan, Taniel** (1884-1915) one of the greatest of Armenian poets, was born in the village of Prknig in the region of Sepasdia (mainland Armenia, nowadays Turkey). He received his secondary education in Venice. For higher education he attended the university courses in Ghent in Belgium, where he studied literature, sociology and economics. He was victim of Armenian Genocide. His poetic works are *Tseghin Sirdé* [The Heart of the Race] (1909), *Hatsin Yerké* [The Song of Bread] (posthumously in 1921), and others. He was a victim of the Armenian Genocide.

**Yesayan, Zabel** (1878-1943) was an acclaimed Western-educated prose writer, critic and activist. She was born in Constantinople, where she completed her secondary education. She completed her higher education at the Sorbonne in the faculty of literature, which she entered at the age of 17. Her writing career began as soon as she went to Paris, where she contributed not only to the Armenian literary journals like *Dzaghigh* [Flower] (1886-1911, Constantinople) and *Anahid* (intermittently 1898-1949, Paris), but also French literary journals such as *Mercure de France* [Mercury of France].

Yesayan was one of the very few female writers who made a remarkable contribution to Armenian literature. The glare of her talent shone mainly through her prose writing; her natural feminine sensibility coupled with a knack for exposing subtle human psychological conditions through her narration, made her one of the important figures of the Armenian fiction. She wrote dozen of novels and novellas, such as *Verchin Pazhag* [Final Glass] (1924, Constantinople), *Hokis Aksorial* [My Exiled Soul] (1922, Vienna), *Silihdari Bardezneré* [The Gardens of Silihdar] (1935, Yerevan; 1950, Cairo) and others. Her most acclaimed work is *Averagnerou Mech* [Amid the Ruins] (1911, Constantinople) a vivid witness account of the aftermath of the horrifying tragedy of the massacres of Adana in 1909. She was one of the

members of the delegation sent by Armenians from Constantinople to provide a first-hand assessment of the situation and to dispense much-needed moral and material support.

She was actively involved in politics and relief work in post-Genocide Armenian life. She was closely engaged in the political activities of the ARF, then after the Sovietisation of Armenia, she became a staunch supporter of the communist regime. Yesayian was also at the forefront of the relief efforts in helping the refugees and the orphans.

Yesayian's journalistic career was connected to the Constantinople traditions as evidenced by her membership of the editorial board *Aztag* (1908-1909, Constantinople). In diaspora she contributed to the pro-Soviet Armenian printed press, such as *Yerevan*.

In 1935 Yesayian emigrated to Soviet Armenia, where she became the victim of Stalin's purge in 1937, dying in a Siberian gulag in 1943. Her intellectual contribution both in diaspora and in Soviet Armenia was crucial.

**Zartarian, Hrach** (1897-1986) was born in the province of Kharpert. He was the son of renowned Genocide victim Armenian writer Roupen Zartarian. He received his education in Constantinople and the Caucasus. He received his higher education at the Sorbonne in literature and political science. In 1923 he attended the medical school of Paris, where he graduated as a dentist. His works are *Mer Gyanké* [Our Life] (1934) and *Vorpatsogh Martig* [Orphaned Men] (1954).

**Zartarian, Rafayel** (1896-1985) was born in the province of Kharpert. He wrote poems in prose. He was the son of the renowned Armenian Genocide victim writer Roupen Zartarian. He was also the brother of the writer Hrach Zartarian.

**Zartarian, Roupen** (1874 -1915) was a prose writer and the editor of the newspaper *Azadamard* [Battle of Freedom] in Constantinople. His only collection of stories is *Tsaykalouys* [Twilight] (1910, Constantinople). He was one of the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

**Zohrab, Krikor** (1861-1915), prose writer, member of the Ottoman Parliament and acclaimed lawyer. His acclaimed works are *Anhedatsadz Serount Mé* [A Vanished Generation] (1887, Constantinople), *Gyanké Inchbes Vor é* [Life as it is] (1911, Constantinople), *Lour Tsaver* [Silent Sorrows] (1911, Constantinople), and others. He was a victim of the Armenian Genocide.

### List of Newspapers, Journals and Periodicals

*Adroushan* [Pagan Temple], 1919, Izmir.

*Arakadz*, 1926, Paris.

*Arev* [Sun], 1908-to present, Cairo.

*Baykar* [Struggle], 1922-1982, Boston.

*Dedragner* [Notebooks], (literary, political and scientific supplement of “Nor Or” [New Day], 1927, Athens.

*Harach* [Forward], 1925-1940, 1945-to present), Paris.

*Hayasdani Gochnag* [Bell of Armenia], Boston, New York.

*Hayrenik* [Fatherland] (newspaper), 1899-1900 (New York), 1900-1991 (Boston). *Hayrenik* (monthly), 1922-1970, Boston.

*Housaper* [Hope Deliverer], 1913-to present, Cairo.

*Mehian* [Pagan Temple], 1914, Constantinople.

*Navasart*, 1923-1926, Bucharest.

*Navasart*, 1922, New York.

*Nor Knar* [New Harp], 1926, Athens.

*Nor Sharzhoum* [New Movement], 1923-1924, Cairo.

*Olimbos*, 1926-1928, Selanik.

*Oshagan*, 1920-1921, Paris.

*Pyunig* [Phoenix], 1918-1920, Boston.

*Yerevan*, 1925-1930, Paris.

*Zeytoun*, 1920, Paris.

*Zartonk* [Revival], 1918-1923, Cairo.